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ABSTRACT

Many feel that textbooks dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum and often the facts learned in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early exposure to books and to reading. The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate and necessary and many teachers rely on them to organize lessons and structure subject matter. The purpose of this book is to provide necessary illumination regarding textbooks in relation to schools, teachers, students, and the national textbook market. Among the discussions included are: What is the American Textbook System?; Why Textbook Reform Matters; What is a Good Textbook?; The Condition of Today's Textbooks; What Scholars Say about Textbooks; The "Bad Writing" Problem; Readability Formulas and Elementary Textbooks; How the Preoccupation with Testable Skills Causes Bad Writing in Textbooks; the "Mentioning" Problem: Too Many Topics in Too Little Space; The Making of a Textbook: A Fictionalized Account; Reforming Textbooks; Recommendations to Policymakers in Adoption States; Recommendations for National Academic Organizations; Recommendations for Foundations; Recommendations for School Districts in Non-Adoption States; Recommendations to Teacher Unions; Recommendations to Publishers; and An Ideal Textbook Adoption Process. Included are statistical tables and a list of typical textbook policies. (CW)

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AMERICA'S TEXTBOOK FIASCO

A CONSPIRACY OF GOOD INTENTIONS

HARRIET TYSON-BERNSTEIN

COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION

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A Conspiracy of Good Intentions

America's Textbook Fiasco

by

Harriet Tyson-Bernstein

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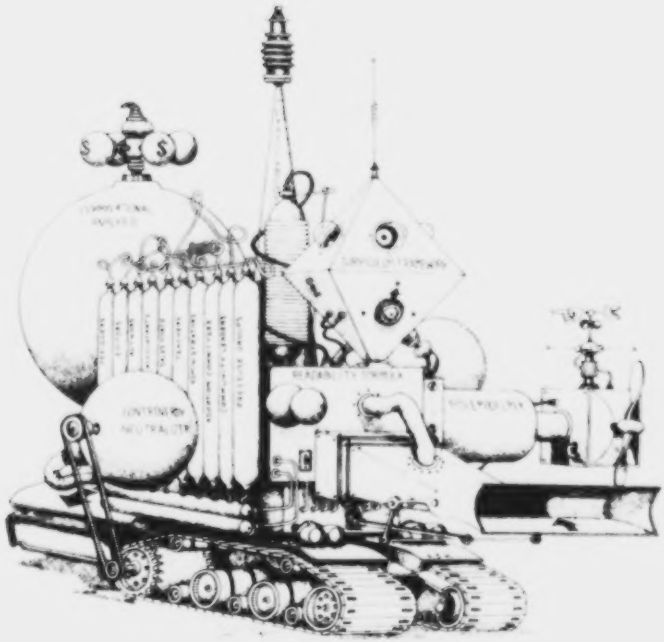

The Great American Textbook Machine

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PREFACE

Textbooks, for better or worse, dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum, and often the facts learned, in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early exposure to books and to reading. The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate, and necessary. And teachers rely on them to organize lessons and structure subject matter.

But the current system of textbook adoption has filled our schools with Trojan horses—glossily-covered blocks of paper whose words emerge to deaden the minds of our nation's youth, and make them enemies of learning.

Yet unlike the radical restructuring of schools and instructions we believe necessary for meaningful improvement of American public education, altering the system of textbook adoption and consequently the quality of textbooks requires not money, but enlightened political will.

The purpose of *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco* is to provide such necessary illumination. Forcefully, persuasively, delightfully, Harriet Tyson-Bernstein sets forth how things are, and how things might be. Unlike other admirable reports that have been published recently (Paul Gagnon's *Democracy's Untold Story* is a fine example and achievement), *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions* is not a critical examination of current content, or lack thereof, in textbooks. Tyson-Bernstein acknowledges the conclusions of these other efforts—and uses them as her starting point.

A Conspiracy of Good Intentions shows us com-

pellingly that, given the political process by which textbooks are written, published, adopted, and bought, we could not hope for anything better than what we have. The best of intentions have indeed wrought the worst of results.

But Harriet Tyson-Bernstein goes further. She uses her knowledge of this political process to develop specific recommendations to change that process for the better—recommendations to policymakers, national academic organizations, foundations, school districts, teacher unions and publishers. Straightforward, sensible, suasive, these are the types of suggestions that can make a difference.

Change—real change—takes time. In education, it takes years, even decades, for ideas that are truly novel to take root. The Council for Basic Education has performed for over thirty years the varied roles of critic, synthesizer, and guide. We have remained ruthlessly independent, willing to remark on the emperor's lack of clothes when necessary. Few groups possess the Council's national perspective and the authority that derives from practical experience with school development programs as well as thirty years of watchdog publications.

Our creed is remarkably simple: that a sound education in the liberal arts is the single best preparation for work, responsible citizenship, and lifelong learning. All elementary and secondary students, regardless of family circumstances or vocational goals, can and should master these basic subjects and are empowered by them. Strengthening the teaching and learning of basic subjects, in turn, requires that curricula be focused and coherent, that

teachers be knowledgeable in their fields and rigorously educated, that they be recruited, renewed, and retained as true professionals, and that administrators understand their roles as educational leaders.

How does *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions* fit into the Council's proud history? Good textbooks, clearly, are essential to good education. Students need access to literature, history, the arts, mathematics and science presented clearly, precisely, and in an interesting fashion. Teachers need books that they can trust, so they are free to devote their energy to the subtleties of teaching. And schools need books that will let them regain the public's confidence in our educational system.

Like so many of our other projects, this study is national in reach. It is a straightforward, unpretentious, accurate picture of the way things stand. It brings to light issues that others have failed to recognize. It makes suggestions for the future. And it asks the policymakers of American education, Are you willing to act?

We look forward to continuing our drive for better textbooks in the months ahead. And we offer our special thanks to Mr. William Woodside, Chairman of the Board of the Institute for Educational Leadership, who offers his eloquent forward here, and to Michael Usdan, President of IEL, with whom we will be collaborating to disseminate *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions* and to promote discussion and—most important—political action.

A. Graham Down
Executive Director
Council for Basic Education

FORWARD

by

William S. Woodside

Chairman, Executive Committee,
Primerica Corporation,

Chairman, Board of Directors,
The Institute for Educational Leadership

I am not an educator and certainly cannot purport to be an expert on the quality of textbooks. My background is as a businessman, having spent 37 years at the Primerica Corporation from which I retired as chairman in 1987.

As I rose through the corporate ranks it became increasingly clear to me that the health and vitality of any major American business has to be closely related to the health and vitality of the educational systems in our diverse communities.

As a result of this deep conviction, I have spent great amounts of time in recent years on issues pertaining to the quality of our schools and have become actively engaged in the constructive debate about education reform which is taking place throughout the country. Harriet Tyson-Bernstein's *A Conspiracy of Good Intentions: America's Textbook Fiasco* is a singularly important and valuable contribution to this dialogue and debate.

As an admitted non-expert in the rather invisible and diffuse process through which our textbooks are developed and adopted, I was stunned by this report which so

cogently describes the qualitative "thinning out" and "dumbing-down" of basic instructional materials. As the author points out, there are no great culprits or villains in this story but critical policy reforms in the development and selection process must be undertaken if textbooks are (as almost everyone seems to agree) such important determinants of the curriculum and learning process for both teachers and students.

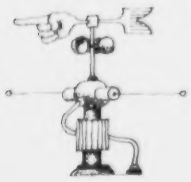
Indeed, if education reform is to be sustained a compelling case can be made that the salient issue of textbook reform can no longer be ignored. As this report suggests, we must develop broadly based support for strategies that will improve the quality of textbooks, the fundamental teaching tool which so vitally influences the instructional process.

I commend this report to all parents, educators, and governmental and business leaders who share such a vital collective stake in the improvement of our schools. The author, Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, and the Council for Basic Education have performed an important and unique public service in publishing this valuable document. It merits the widest possible exposure among educational policymakers and the general public. I am particularly pleased that the Institute for Education Leadership will be working with the Council in national dissemination efforts.

PART ONE

GOOD INTENTIONS GONE WRONG

Authors and editors do not willingly chop and flatten sentences, nor do they thoughtlessly mangle storylines. The source of the writing problem is not in the publishing house, but in the public agency. Legislators, educational policymakers, and administrative regulators have unintentionally drained the life out of children's textbooks.



"If the customer wants a pink stretch Cadillac, I may think it's tacky and wasteful, but I would be a fool to produce a fuel-efficient black compact if nobody is going to buy it."

textbook executive

"The most frustrating part of the job is that the user isn't the buyer."

textbook author

"The books are all alike anyway, so we don't even bother to read them. We go for the publisher who gives us the biggest freebie package."

curriculum supervisor

"They have broken up learning into bits no larger than an eyelash, and the kids aren't able to sweep up the pieces."

textbook editor

"All I know is we can make those publishers do what we tell them to do. They support our curriculum, and our scores are going up."

city superintendent

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a public policy system that is perfectly designed to produce textbooks that confuse, mislead, and profoundly bore students, while at the same time making all of the adults involved in the process look good, not only in their own eyes, but in the eyes of others. Although there are some good textbooks on the market, publishers and editors are virtually compelled by public policies and practices to create textbooks that confuse students with non sequiturs, that mislead them with misinformation, and that profoundly bore them with pointlessly arid writing.

None of the adults in this very complex system intends this outcome. To the contrary, each of them wants to produce good effects, and each public policy, regulation, or conventional practice was intended to make some improvement or prevent some abuse. But the cumulative effects of well-intentioned and seemingly reasonable state and local regulation are textbooks that squander the intellectual capital of our youth.

Some critics of the American textbook system would disagree with our good intentions hypothesis. It could be argued that adoption policies that fail to secure serious reviewers, fail to give them adequate time to review materials, and fail to compensate them are not well intended. The case could be made that special interest groups that fight for their own particular views to the exclusion of others are not well intended. Publishers who concern themselves only with sales could be accused of bad intentions. We believe, though, that most school boards, and perhaps even top administrators, are simply unaware of the relationship between superficial adoption policies and

superficial textbooks. Zealots and idealogues, however distasteful they may be to their opponents, generally believe they are protecting children from harm. And publishers, as businessmen, cannot be expected to be idealists; their first obligation is to return a profit, not to render a public service.

You might suppose that such a system could not exist. If it did, wouldn't those responsible for the educational system change it? Or if not, you might suppose that citizens would rise up in sufficient force to create a better way. But you would be mistaken; such a system does exist, and there is at the moment no noticeable effort to change it.

What Is The American Textbook System?

The textbook system in the United States was designed at the turn of the century to deal with turn-of-the-century issues—cost control, corruption, and the consolidation of state curricular authority. Twenty-two states, now generally called "adoption states," enacted legislation requiring a centralized textbook adoption system. In the intervening decades, state school authorities have extended their controls over textbooks.

Turn-of-the-century legislators tended to see textbooks as a commodity—like bleachers or blackboards—and sought to control costs and ensure durability. In more recent decades, each new social , economic or military

MARKET SEGMENTATION

crisis brought forth advocacy groups demanding textbooks responsive to the causes they championed. To fend off criticism from the special interest groups swarming around school policymakers, textbook publishers began the process of adding more and more material to textbooks. Suddenly there were pictures of multiracial groups, women doing non-traditional jobs, active senior citizens and handicapped persons; there were biographies of formerly obscure figures; there were inspirational messages about the work ethic, environmental protection, and healthy food. The newly required pictures and text had to be accommodated within the fixed confines of the standard-sized book, and therefore the treatment of all topics and ideas was somewhat diminished—however worthy all the causes.

Over the last decade, though, it is educators themselves, not special interest groups, who have made the greatest contribution to the thinning out and dumbing down of textbook content. As the public began demanding evidence that schools were making good use of their money, educators tried to produce higher student performance on standardized tests. That effort, in turn, has led them to attempt aligning the curriculum, the textbooks, and the tests. This self-defeating congruence between the elements of the instructional program rests on the unassailable logic that students will achieve higher scores if they are tested on what they have studied. Following that logic, adoption- state authorities have increasingly begun to specify, in excruciating detail, all the facts, terms, and topics that must be included in the textbooks they are willing to buy.

However reasonable the idea of curricular congru-

ence (or alignment) may seem, it is profoundly misguided in the American context. If we lived in a country with one national curriculum, then textbook publishers could compete with each other in the effort to produce a book that would best mirror that one curriculum. But we are not such a country. Instead, we have dozens of powerful ministries of education issuing undisciplined lists of particulars that publishers must include in the textbooks. Since publishers must sell in as many jurisdictions as possible in order to turn a profit, their books must incorporate this melange of test-oriented trivia, pedagogical faddism, and inconsistent social messages.

AS NORTH CAROLINA GOES, SO GOES THE NATION

W. Dallas Herring, a history buff and coffin maker from Rose Hill, North Carolina, was chairman of the North Carolina State Board of Education in 1966. In May of that year, when publishers were trying to get their U.S. history textbooks on North Carolina's state adoption list, Herring complained that North Carolina's role in U.S. history had been neglected.

According to Bill Graves, a reporter for the Raleigh NEWS AND OBSERVER, Herring was particularly disturbed by textbooks that failed to mention the Revolutionary War battle of Moore's Creek Bridge, which lies about 45 miles south of Rose Hill..

Patriots in the 1775 battle stopped Loyalist troops from making a rendezvous on the coast with British forces commanded by Gen. Charles Cornwallis.

In Herring's view, as reported by Graves in the Raleigh NEWS AND OBSERVER, the battle was important "because it delayed Cornwallis' entrance into North Carolina and kept him from gaining an early foothold in the South."

Herring's fellow board members agreed with him and decided to put off adopting history books for a year. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, whose "Rise of the American Nation" was the only book used in North Carolina at the time, produced a 1967 revision of the book with a full account of the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge. Like many state school-board members, Herring was unaware of his power. Graves reports that Herring "was surprised to see how responsive they were to my initial complaints." Said Herring, "It is a sensitive matter. After all, we are dealing with millions of dollars. And they were sweating blood."

Today, students across the nation still read a 250-word account in "Rise of the American Nation," a book still widely used in North Carolina and elsewhere in the nation. "In fact," writes Graves, "they read more about the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge than about the Boston Tea Party or the First Continental Congress. And the battle now appears in other U.S. history books as well."

In the current regulatory environment, textbooks have gradually lost overall coherence. Even important topics are treated so skimpily that a beginner often fails to get the point. Under current selection procedures, those responsible for choosing the best among available books seem blind to the incoherence and unreadability of the book because they are merely ascertaining the *presence* of the required material, not its depth or clarity. It is therefore more profitable for publishers to include everything in the "bid-specifications" of the ten or fifteen major market areas, whether or not students can actually get any pleasure or meaning out of the text.

Thus the *de facto* national curriculum is a thin stream of staccato prose winding through an excessive number of pictures, boxes, and charts. Artful evasions cover the philosophical gaps within and among the large adoption states. The *de facto* national teacher training institution is a teacher guide that increasingly reads like a script.State agency policies, however well intentioned, have thus compelled most textbooks to cover more information than can be treated respectfully. The context necessary to make facts meaningful has been edited out to make room for still more facts. The vignettes and even the adjectives that would make history readable and enjoyable have lost out to more names, dates, and terms. The large ideas that make sense out of scientific data have been sacrificed to make room for more parts and components. Because the books try to contain too much, they usually have no discernible theme.

Textbook publishers claim, with considerable justice, that their books are "what the market wants," or "what teachers want." But this claim calls forth the image of eight

people at a restaurant who order eight different kinds of soup. The waiter mixes all the soups together and gives each customer a bowlful. The amalgam may be nutritious, but it is also themeless and confusing. Nobody, willingly, would eat such a concoction.

Textbooks will not get better (and later we define what "better" means) until a critical mass of reform-minded policymakers understands the destructive and interactive effects of various state and local textbook adoption policies and selection practices.

The first section of this report discusses the books themselves. The two most pervasive textbook sins—bad writing and superficiality— are traced to their origin in public policies and procedures, and to attitudes and beliefs commonly held by the teachers who ultimately select books for state, district, or school.

Section two is a fictionalized account of the production and ultimate adoption of a textbook. The story is fictional but not false. Although the events in the story could not have happened in any one state or publishing house, every seemingly outlandish event has occurred somewhere in the recent past. And because textbook publishers aim at a national market, the state and local behaviors depicted here have had an impact everywhere. Admittedly a caricature and definitely playful in tone, our story is designed to give the reader insight into the way things really work.

In the third section, we set forth specific changes in policy, practice, and attitude that must take place if textbooks are going to get better, and we indicate who should have responsibility for those changes.

Section four is a sketch of a model textbook adoption

process. The purpose would be to reward publishers who produce coherent, engaging, well-written textbooks that students enjoying reading and are able to remember.

Appendix One is a list of typical textbook adoption policies and practices that add significantly to the cost of textbooks without adding to their value to students.

Appendix Two is a set of statistical tables on textbook purchasing nationwide.

Why Textbook Reform Matters

Students, as well as adults, learn from what they read. Thus the character and quality of what students read strongly influence what they learn and whether they remember it.

Children need to form the idea early in life that books open up worlds of delight and vicarious experience. If school officials purchase primers containing empty or pointless stories written in stilted, unnatural English, they have lost a major opportunity to convince children that reading is both joyful and satisfying.

According to virtually all studies of the matter, textbooks have become the *de facto* curriculum of the public schools, as well as the *de facto* mechanism for controlling teachers. Idealists lament the growing trend toward teacher dependency on textbooks and advocate the use of trade books (real books) and original source materials, especially in history and literature, rather than today's blockbuster, sales-oriented textbooks. However desirable

it might be to abandon textbooks in certain subjects, widespread use of non-textbook materials is not likely to occur in the near future.

A demoralized teaching force has been easily seduced by textbook programs that offer to take much of the work out of teaching. Moreover, even those teachers who advocate teacher-made materials rarely have the time to do the extra work necessary to assemble them. State and local administrators respond to the siren call of textbooks that promise to "cover" their curricular and testing programs, however superficially. Supervisors believe that tightly scripted teacher guides can make up for teacher deficiencies. Parents often feel their children are being shortchanged unless they are assigned a textbook that resembles the ones they remember from their own schooling.

For all these reasons, it is likely that textbooks will remain a fixture in American education. It is therefore critical that textbooks stimulate rather than deaden students' curiosity, and that teacher manuals encourage, rather than squelch teachers' initiative and flexibility.

Textbooks, through their connection to school authority, also set an example of the way our language should be written. Modern research on writing has demonstrated the strong connection between reading and writing. Not only must students read in order to learn to write; they must be exposed to good writing. They need textbooks written in clear, coherent, powerful English. To the extent that school officials purchase books that fail to exemplify good writing, they have missed a major opportunity to teach what urgently needs to be taught.

Serious attempts to call forth excellent textbooks

appear to be a realistic strategy for improving teaching and learning as well. At its best, a textbook can be a unified and thoughtfully sequenced engagement with ideas and information. If textbooks didn't exist, we likely would have to invent them.

For all of these reasons, we believe that textbook reform is important. Reform will require political and administrative changes that disrupt conventional power arrangements and challenge conventional wisdom. That will be difficult.

On the bright side, textbook reform is likely to be the least expensive way to make a beneficial difference in American education. The other things we need to do—raise teacher salaries, develop serious teacher induction programs, provide more intensive education for at-risk children, just to name a few—await public willingness to spend more money on schooling. By contrast, textbook reform is relatively cheap. More than anything else, it requires understanding and political will—two no-cost items. Beyond that, it requires a relatively small investment in a better selection process and in more plentiful, varied materials.

According to the American Association of Publishers industry statistics, ***the average school district spent $4,000 per child in 1986, of which only $34.17 was spent on instructional materials.*** Even a doubling of the average textbook account would be only a marginal increase in school expenditures, from .85 percent to 1.7 percent.

Before discussing the condition of today's textbooks, we set forth our definition of a good textbook so that the reader will know what results this report seeks to achieve.

What Is A Good Textbook?

The very first textbook given to young children in school ought to be so delightful that they want to read more books. Children would not only be thrilled by their growing ability to crack the code of written language, they would also be ushered into the riches of our culture. The skills taught in reading books would be closely related to, and not divorced from, the content of the stories. Mathematics books for young children would help them think mathematically and let them practice their skills on problems worth solving. *All* books written for elementary students ought to contain information that is important to adults as well as children. Parents, as well as students, would enjoy reading them.

Books for older students ought to have a theme or purpose that is crystal clear. Topics and facts would support, and not distract from, the overall theme. Important and difficult topics—gravity, for example, or the constitutional system of checks and balances—would be presented with enough depth for students to understand. Information about the lives and cultures of minorities, women, workers, or ordinary people would not be stuck on gaudily, but integrated into the text. Controversy—so essential to both democracy and intellectual growth—would be embraced rather than avoided. Students would share in defeats as well as triumphs of those who shaped history or built bodies of knowledge.

Facts ought to be accurate. Questions and exercises ought to encourage students to think rather than force them to hunt down trivial details. Chapter summaries

would forge essential connections between ideas; they would not merely be cheat sheets for the questions at the chapter's end.

Good textbooks for any grade level or subject ought to be written so students can benefit from the book independently. If students miss a lecture, are absent from school, or merely want to review what was covered in class, they would read the book with some prospect of gathering meaning. The author ought to give students reason for persisting through inevitable patches of drudgery. Most important, the book would be written so students can remember what they read.

The Condition Of Today's Textbooks

Sadly, very few of today's textbooks meet such criteria. There are some excellent books on the market, and among those that are merely good or average, some are marginally better than others. Even the most deadly or dense textbook may have good paragraphs here and there, or some good chapters, or other attractive features. There are timeless classics—Gregg Shorthand and Euclid's Geometry, for example. Literature anthologies are usually good, but then they can scarcely avoid being good since their purpose is to present the best that has been written. There are a few coherent, well-written, even exciting history books. In general, though, the best among them do not sell very well, according to Herbert R. Adams, former president of Laidlaw Brothers Publishing Company.

The best thing that can be said about today's textbooks is that they are physically beautiful and convenient for teachers. The book and its accompanying "extras" come packaged in a beautiful box. The graphic design on the cover rivals that of an expensive coffee-table book. The paper is so thick that if you hold it up to the light, you cannot see the print on the back side. There are usually one or more beautiful four-color illustrations on every page. The layout of the text is stylish, sometimes jazzy.

The book itself, though, has moved off center stage in many adoption contests; it is now only one among a cast of dozens in the drama. The leading character is now the teacher's edition, which explains how to present the material and run the class. At their best, teacher's editions contain explicit suggestions, ideas for class activities, and strategies for students who need more help or additional challenge. At their worst, they are a rigid script, providing exact words for the teacher to repeat in class and eliminating the need for lesson planning. There are also workbooks of varying quality, "skill sheets," test packs, posters, maps, tapes, and even sample letters for teachers to send parents. All of these "extras" make teaching more convenient and spare the teacher the trouble of gathering or creating materials to go along with the textbook.

What Scholars Say About Textbooks

Until recently, most studies focused on the information contained in textbooks. This approach is usually undertaken by experts in specific subjects, many of them advocates of particular schools of thought or practitioners of sub-specialties within a discipline. Almost without exception, studies of this kind criticize the books for omissions and call for more of what these partisans consider important for children to learn. Although content-based critiques seldom influence publishers directly, they sometimes create a climate of opinion that ultimately influences those policymakers who are in a position to control the content of textbooks.

Another kind of analysis is undertaken by advocates of particular causes. Over the last few decades, black advocacy groups, followed by women's groups, and then a host of others representing ethnic minorities, the elderly, and the handicapped, have criticized textbooks either for ignoring their constituents or for presenting them as stereotypes. Because these groups aim their efforts in the proper direction—at those who make education policy and establish criteria for textbook selection—they have had an enormous and partially beneficial impact.

It must be noted, though, that the portrayal in textbooks of those who have traditionally been maligned or ignored is still largely mechanical and superficial. For reasons beyond the control of advocacy groups, textbook publishers, and school policymakers, we have not advanced beyond the tokenism that sufficed in the 1960s.

More recently, new advocacy groups have examined textbooks for their treatment of biological evolution, environmental issues, the influence of religion on history, and ethical issues in science and technology. Liberals have detected conservative bias, and conservatives have detected liberal bias. The most important things to note about the content-based studies are these: First, they have all resulted in the inclusion of *more* not *less* material in textbooks. However worthy the causes, textbook writers have been forced to compress material already in the book in order to make room for more.

Second, content studies attract press coverage because they concern the most sensitive and controversial issues in our society— race, gender, religion, politics, and sex.

Third, because press coverage tends to prompt adult concern, most citizens who think about textbooks at all (and most do not) believe that the troubles with textbooks center on these hot and divisive issues.

Over the past fifteen years, though, another genre of textbook study has emerged. The new scholarship does not examine textbooks from an ideological standpoint, or criticize them for failing to cover the universe of adult interests and concerns. Rather, it is concerned with the subtle interaction between the mind of the reader and the words on the page. It sheds new light on how children (and adults) comprehend what they read. It affirms what experience has taught us all—that we learn and remember particulars much better if they are placed in a meaningful context. The new research has demonstrated the educational value of coherence, clarity, depth, and style.

The mere presence of information about acid rain,

evolution, ethics, capitalism, or third-world countries does not mean students will be willing to read or able to comprehend and remember. Much of the criticism of textbooks in this report is anchored to the findings of the many talented researchers who care as much about whether children learn as about what they learn.

Although the flaws in today's textbooks vary according to grade level and subject, two serious flaws afflict the vast majority of commercially prepared materials for schoolchildren: writing is poor and books treat most topics so superficially that students can't make sense of what they are reading.

THE "BAD WRITING" PROBLEM

> "Rabbit said: 'I can run. I can run fast. You can't run fast.' Turtle said, 'Look Rabbit. See the park. You and I will run. We'll run to the park.'"
>
> Rabbit said, 'I want to stop. I'll stop here. I can run, but turtle can't. I can get to the park fast.' Turtle said,'I can't run fast. But I will not stop. Rabbit can't see me. I'll get to the park.'"

In this nearly unrecognizable version of "The Hare and the Tortoise," the main points of the fable—the danger of cockiness and the value of persistence—are utterly lost. Its repetitions are pointless at best and boring at worst. Unfortunately, this kind of editorial mangling is typical of material our children are forced to read in the early grades of school.

Susan Ohanian, in "Ruffles and Flourishes," (ATLANTIC MONTHLY, September 1987) says, "Basal readers can be criticized on lots of grounds. Their worst fault, I think, is that for no good reason, they squeeze the juice out of some very fine tales." Comparing a passage from the Paul Leyssac translation of Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Clothes," she finds the following:

> "Magnificent!" Excellent!" "Prodigious!" went from mouth to mouth, and everyone was exceedingly pleased.

Had been changed to:

> "How marvelous," they echoed the emperor. "How beautiful."

And in "How the Camel Got His Hump," Ohanian notices that Kipling's "a great big lolliping humph" has been changed to "a great big humph." "You lose a great big lolliping lot when you lose the humph's gerundive," she writes.

Beatrix Potter, whose judgment about what children can and will read is substantiated by the choices made by children at libraries and parents at bookstores, said that children "like a fine word occasionally." Researchers have also demonstrated that kids, as well as adults, like an occasional big word that is delicious to say.

Not only have the fine words been taken out. The basic elements of good storytelling often get lost in the editing process. In his study of elementary readers, Bertram Bruce of Bolt, Beranek and Newman, Inc., found that

the conflict essential to any good story has often been suppressed. Moreover, the engaging voice of a narrator, which can bind readers to the story and give them glimpses into characters' thoughts, is often missing.

Comparing the original Judy Blume story "Freckle Juice" with the textbook version, Bruce shows what happens to an otherwise good story about a freckled boy who thinks his life would be happier if he could get rid of his freckles. In the story, a friend sells the boy some "freckle juice," a vile concoction to smear on his face. In the textbook version, the reader gets little information about why the boy doesn't like his freckles or why he allows himself to be gulled by his friend. "Without these elements," says Bruce, "The story makes little sense."

In general, the writing in elementary schoolbooks is choppy, stilted, and monotonous. Worse still, the words and the phrases that help a novice reader infer the correct relationships between ideas and events are often stripped away.

Authors and editors do not willingly chop and flatten sentences, nor do they thoughtlessly mangle storylines. The source of the writing problem is not in the publishing house, but in the public agency. Legislators, educational policymakers, and administrative regulators have unintentionally drained the life out of children's textbooks in several ways.

First, they have rejected textbooks that fail to achieve a mandated numerical score on a readability formula, a number they believe will guarantee a proper match between the text's difficulty and the reading ability of children at a given grade level.

Second, they have favored books that present a par-

ticular list of vocabulary words or teach a particular list of abstract skills, (e.g. "finding the main idea"), over books that might ignite children.

Third, they have discouraged publishers from investing the time and effort it takes to produce carefully written material by failing to buy from publishers who do produce well written textbooks.

Readability Formulas And Elementary Textbooks

Readability formulas were developed over 60 years ago to help educators choose textbooks written at the appropriate level of difficulty. The designers of readability formulas, then and now, operated on the assumption that long words, unfamiliar words, and long sentences are the primary causes of reading difficulty. Judging the difficulty of a text by such formulas is easy. Some formulas count syllables in words and words in sentences and calculate averages. Others rely on lists of words deemed to be familiar to children at various ages, adding points for words children are not believed to know. These mechanical labors yield a score that represents the grade level of a passage or a textbook.

When educators used readability formulas informally, along with common sense, to judge reading difficulty, these formulas had no harmful effects. But when policymakers and regulators began to make them part of official policies and procedures, the picture began to change. Publishers discovered they could lose a sale if an adoption committee subjected a randomly chosen pas-

sage to a formula analysis and found that the score was too high or too low. Defensively, textbook authors and editors began to write or adapt text so that it would survive a readability formula check. Short words ("it," for example) had to be substituted for long words ("elephant," for example).

The popular phrase, "dumbing down," aptly describes the effect of readability formulas on not only elementary books, but also junior high textbooks. Even the simple cadence of language can be cruelly monotonous. To add confusion to boredom, short and vague words are often substituted for longer, precise ones. Instead of "esophagus," there will be "food tube." Instead of "protoplasm," there will be "stuff."[1]

Compound or complex sentences have been chopped in two, often at the expense of the reader's comprehension, in order to lower the score. For example:

> ORIGINAL: "If given a chance before another fire comes, a tree will heal its own wounds by growing new bark over the burned parts."
> ADAPTED: "If given a chance before another fire comes, the tree will heal its own wounds. It will grow new bark over the burned parts."

In this instance, the way in which trees heal themselves—by growing new bark—is unstated in the edited version. "[A]n inexperienced reader, or one who does not know very much about trees, might make an incorrect guess and see healing wounds and growing new bark as separate processes, simply ordered in time," writes Andee Rubin, a textbook researcher.[2] This butchery is clearly

attributable to an editorial effort to bring down the readability score.

The limitations of readability formulas have been exposed by contemporary researchers. It is clear that readability formulas are blind to both meaning and style. Although their purpose was to provide a gross indication of grade level, the paradoxical effect of their misuse as a formula for writing has been to make text harder to understand. Moreover, the required use of words that children are presumed to know already puts too tight a reign on the growth of their vocabulary.

Despite the mounting evidence that writing to meet a formula is educationally unsound, specified formulas and scores are required in some states by law and in others by regulation. Even in states and localities with no formal requirements, judging the difficulty of a textbook by formula is still common practice.

Research has shown that at least five experienced teachers (five is the number needed to offset out biases and poor judgment), if given a modicum of training, are quite good at judging the reading difficulty of a text. Yet teachers have also become increasingly reluctant to exercise "subjective" judgment, preferring the safety of an "objective" measure. With so many dimensions of a book to consider in an adoption process, this one—Is the book easy enough?—can be nailed down without much effort. A committee member can check the "readabilities" with one eye on the TV or with the help of a computer program.

Even though many school jurisdictions have recently abandoned readability formulas as a "make or break" selection criterion, formulas are still used in enough important market areas to keep editors tethered to them. As long

as any major market area misuses this tool as a primary criterion for textbook adoption, children will continue to be bored and confused by much of what they read in school.

How The Preoccupation With Testable Skills Causes Bad Writing In Textbooks

Readability formulas, as we noted earlier, are only one of the causes of bad writing. Another is the current accountability movement. Increasingly, educational accountability has become synonymous with student achievement on standardized tests of rudimentary skills. Few states or localities test subject knowledge, but virtually all schools test the skills said to be critical to a mastery of content. Not surprisingly, textbook publishers have also begun to emphasize skills more than subject content.

Even when testing is limited to skills, the most available form of mass testing—the multiple choice test—limits even skills to those that accommodate a short answer form. Thus, even though writing is a "skill," it will rarely be tested by asking students to write a composition, but by asking them to identify correct usage from among several options, to fill in blanks in sentences, to correct punctuation and capitalization, or other recognition tasks.

Similarly, reading is a "skill," but the multiple choice format shrinks most test passages to a paragraph. In the early grades, children are expected to learn letter sounds in certain sequences, and are tested accordingly on their ability to recognize similarities and differences in letter sounds in the test passages. Increasingly, textbooks are

designed to help children pass such tests. "Too often," says Andee Rubin, "the books for children in grades one through three are full of stories "whose claim to coherence is that they use the same vowel in almost every word."

Publishers of elementary reading books have put their shoulders to the wheel of test improvement because their principal customers— teachers—are becoming increasingly nervous about their students' test performances. Instead of designing a book from the standpoint of its subject or its capacity to capture the children's imagination, editors are increasingly organizing elementary reading series around the content and timing of standardized tests.

If commas are taught in September, but not tested until April, the book will administer a little comma dose every few lessons from October through May so children will be able to answer questions about commas on the test.

Frequently, says Diane Ravitch of Columbia University, the stories are being written by people who have never been heard of outside of textbook publishing houses. Under present policy, though, it could hardly be otherwise. Gifted writers of children's trade books are reluctant to write for textbook companies, or even to surrender their already published work to the technocratic editors concerned with readability formulas, vocabulary controls, and standardized multiple-choice tests.

The emphasis on testable skills is not limited to elementary textbooks. Books written for junior and senior high school students are laced with exercises claiming to develop "critical thinking skills" even though the text itself may do very little to stimulate thinking. Nobody would suggest that children should not learn how to think, but the

dynamics of the textbook market encourage publishers to feature an almost content-free approach to "thinking," rather than allowing the content to drive children to think about what they are reading.

As these skills become imbedded in the "scope and sequence" charts, or "curriculum frameworks" of major states and cities, publishers are pressed to plan skills to be "taught" on each page, even before the text has been written. Publishers must also provide an index to the required skills, by page number, so that curriculum directors who don't have time actually to read the books can satisfy themselves that the skills are being "taught." A long string of page references behind "main idea," for example, impresses some curriculum directors who don't have time to discover that the main idea might not be worth finding. Clearly, many books are planned to satisfy the superficial selection process rather than to satisfy the curiosity of students.

The "Mentioning" Problem: Too Many Topics In Too Little Space

Another pervasive textbook sin is "mentioning," a term coined by researcher Dolores Durkin at the University of Illinois. The term refers to textbook prose that flits from fact to fact, statement to statement, and topic to topic, without giving the reader the context that would make sense of the factual information. Books accused of "mentioning" are generally long on facts and terms but short on ideas and explanations. Without the necessary context,

readers often fail to see the significance of the connections between statements. Metaphors and similes, which would help readers grasp a complicated concept, are remarkably infrequent, even when we allow for how difficult it is to find metaphors that immature readers can understand. Examples and counter-examples that would give a concept some roundness are rare.

In an effort to satisfy the content requirements of so many adoption authorities, the text must be compressed into incomprehensibility. The following passage from a world history textbook illustrates the problem:

> A COMMON WORLD VIEW: The individuals in a civilization shared certain religious beliefs, moral values, and customs. These shared ideas and attitudes were the cultural glue that held society together. The particular values and preferences of a civilization are often revealed in its art and architecture. The art of Islamic civilization, for example, included little sculpture. Europeancivilization has both stone and wood sculpture.

The grand generalizations in the first three sentences are followed by stubby particulars in the last two. In order to understand the connection between "values" and "sculpture," a reader would already have to know the Islamic religious view on graven images. Without that knowledge, the passage makes no sense, and is made even less sensible by the irrelevance of "both stone and wood sculpture." This paragraph, like a great many in today's textbooks, should have been three separate paragraphs, each with more information and greater coherence.

In science books, the density of new, italicized, (but poorly explained) technical terms on each page is a good measure of the extent of mentioning. Entire books, like the biology example below, are often glossaries masquerading as textbooks.

> NUCLEIC ACIDS New vocabulary: chromosome, nucleic acid, DNA, RNA, nucleotide.
>
> In the nucleus of a cell are threadlike strands called *chromosomes*, (KRO' -muh -somz). They are composed of proteins and *nucleic acids* (noo -KLAY' -ik). The proteins in nucleic acids make up two important chemicals, *DNA* and *RNA*. Nucleic acids are organic compounds that are made up of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, and phosphorous.
>
> DNA and RNA are not the only nucleic acids, but they do have special roles in the cell. RNA is involved in making proteins. DNA is involved in controlling the cell's activities. *Both are involved in passing on characteristics from parents to offspring.*
>
> Each nucleic acid is made up of units called *nucleotides*(NOO' -klee -uh -tidz). In turn, each nucleotide is composedof three parts: a chemical group containing phosphorous, a group containing nitrogen, and a simple sugar.

If you find this passage incomprehensible, then pity the poor ninth-grader. In this tangle of passive voice sentences, cause-and-effect relationships become lost. The author switches back and forth between parts and chemical compounds without warning. The signals—"are com-

posed of" and "are made up of"—are inconsistently applied. The intelligent response to this kind of "mentioning" and bad writing is "So what," or "Who cares." Many of today's science textbooks are a "prosified syllabus," according to Kevin Padian, Professor of Paleontology at the University of California at Berkeley.

The "mentioning" problem, like the bad writing problem, is directly attributable to public policies and procedures. Adoption states that generate excessively detailed textbook specifications seldom take into account the time it would take to teach all their required items, or the space available in a standard-sized textbook. Typical selection procedures seldom take into account the critical mass of information a student needs to understand an unfamiliar topic.

The problem of too many topics in too little space is especially severe in social studies, history, and science books. The Thirty Years' War will be "covered" in a paragraph; the Nixon presidency in two sentences. Nucleotides will be mentioned, and the glossary will contain a circular definition, but the student will not learn much about them. All of the small facts and terms that can be tested on a multiple-choice test will appear in the index, because that is where adoption committees usually check on curricular and test "congruence" if they check at all.

In recent decades, the "mentioning" problem has become more acute. Special interest groups pressure policymakers to include more material in the curriculum (and therefore the textbooks) about their favorite subjects. Policymakers find it difficult to resist these pressures because, for the most part, the additions sound reasonable. A state or local schoolboard can submit, with-

out a troubled conscience, to demands from environmentalists, the health food lobby, animal protection groups, AIDS education proponents, patriots, advocates of the work ethic, and any organized minority group.

Even where good causes are not involved, there are adult pressures to teach more and more academic material as the scope of knowledge within disciplines expands. School systems, test developers, and textbook publishers often ask university professors to serve on advisory committees, and in that setting, professors generally defer to one another, cheerfully adding each other's suggestions to the list of what should be taught.

F. James Rutherford, chief education officer for the American Academy for the Advancement of Science, has described the difficulty of getting one or more professors to agree on a manageable list of topics. Rutherford, with the help of Gerald Holton and Fletcher Watson, headed a well-funded effort in the 1960s to produce a good high school physics course."We carefully selected people who were committed to the notion that a physics book can't be encyclopedic. But when we got the group together in a working session, there were difficulties. When any topic was considered for exclusion, someone would rise to make a persuasive case that the topic was important and could be well taught. We lacked principles for what to put in and what to leave out, or a way to consider topics apart from personal experience," says Rutherford.

In addition to state and local requirements, social pressures, and academic logrolling, there is also the knowledge explosion. New schools of thought are frequently born; new research continues to roll off the presses of academic journals, and every passing year creates another

year of history.

With so much material to stuff into the book, editors make sacrifices. Since publishers are held to account for a jumble of topics and facts, but not for coherence, coherence suffers. A thoughtful reader finds it difficult to detect the pattern that has determined an author's choices.

Even though most textbooks have an announced theme, it is often too vague to qualify as an organizing principle. A recent world history book has the overall theme, "Links Across Time and Place," and sub- themes called "A Global Perspective," "Critical and Creative Thinking," and "Valuing Diversity." These suggest that the book *is not* a course on Western Civilization, but beyond that, they are more rhetorical than real.

Lacking any firm basis for choosing material, and required to include so much, textbook authors easily fall into the "mentioning" trap. A student may be told, for example, that Aristotle "studied the political organization of 150 city states and put down his conclusions in a book called *Politics*." He won't be told, however, what Aristotle's conclusions were.

"These omissions are not for lack of space, which could have been made by refusing to 'mention' legions of trivial facts," writes Paul Gagnon, author of a recently published study of world history textbooks.[3] Rather, these omissions "result from the authors' failures to select, and to explain in the pages available, the most important facts and ideas about the subject being treated." These failures, in turn, arise "from the author's neglect of major themes or great questions around which to organize the material," says Gagnon.

Gagnon is right if he is talking about what is best for

students, but publishers must do what educational officials and adoption committees want if they are to sell books. At the moment, those officials prefer mentioning to coherence because they are obsessed with the idea that the textbook must cover as many of the facts and topics in the curriculum and tests as possible. With so little time to examine books, adoption committees check up on textbook/curriculum/ test congruence by checking the labels, captions, index, and glossary. Knowing how superficially books are examined, publishers are best advised to sacrifice depth and comprehensibility and concentrate on coverage, however inadequate it may be.

TEXAS NO LONGER THE BIGGEST VILLAIN

School officials around the nation generally like to blame Texas for the troubles with textbooks. Texas-bashing is still a popular pastime for school officials who like to believe that Texas creates the problem and they themselves are innocent bystanders. Over the last five years, though, Texas education policymakers have made a number of changes that have diminished the state's legendary power over textbooks.

One major change has occurred in the procedures for adoption. Before 1983, only people who had negative things to say about textbooks were allowed to testify at the public hearings before the State Textbook Committee. Fundamentalist text-

book critics, Mel and Norma Gabler of Longview, Texas were allowed to criticize books for hours, and sometimes days. People for the American Way, a Washington-based organization opposed to textbook censorship, took the lead in changing the procedures. By 1983, PFAW, in coalition with other organizations, pressured the State Board to change the procedures so that people with positive comments about textbooks could testify at public hearings. According to Barbara Parker, a former member of the PFAW's Washington staff, "when the hearing process was opened up, the amount of time everybody had to testify was drastically reduced and the Gabler monopoly was broken."

"Without a doubt," says Jane Wells, former member of the Texas State Board of Education former Texas liaison for the American Association of Publishers, "the Gablers have moderated their views. The press doesn't play them up anymore to the exclusion of others."

A second change—and a major one—occurred in 1985 when the Texas legislature replaced the twenty-seven-member elected school board, which had been dominated by Fundamentalists, with a fifteen-member appointed board. The new board sent a clear message to publishers that Texas officials didn't want textbooks watered down to reflect political or parochial interests.

The new board also replaced an accumulation of detailed curriculum requirements with a less prescriptive curriculum framework, the Essential Elements. Although more skill-based than knowl-

edge-based, the Essential Elements are sufficiently general to allow authors and publishers some much-needed latitude. With the exception of some required details about the free enterprise system, Texas now contributes less to the problem of "mentioning" in textbooks than adoption states in the southeastern United States.

Publishers also sacrifice material that may cause them to be criticized or to lose sales. In *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century,* historian Frances FitzGerald writes. "Some of the . . . texts, and some chapters within them, take up subjects they don't have the space to treat properly, and then ask questions that cannot be answered, or can be answered only improperly, because of the paucity of information."[4] She, and others, find that important groups or individuals are mentioned without any information about what they thought or did. The struggles of non-white peoples are mentioned, "but in order to sell books to a majority, they sometimes refrain from mentioning what these groups are struggling against," FitzGerald observes.

Pressures from the politically organized, religious right have made it risky for publishers to discuss evolution. If evolution is discussed at all, it is often confined to a chapter at the end of the book. Students are conducted on a forced march through the phyla, and given no understanding of the overarching theory (evolution) that gives taxonomy life and meaning. Touchy subjects, like dinosaurs, the fossil record, genetics, natural selection, or even the scientific meanings of the words "theory" and "belief"

are treated skimpily or vaguely in order to avoid the ire of Biblical fundamentalists.

When publishers omit information that might offend someone, even if it is crucial to student understanding, they kill two birds with one stone. The text is shortened to make room for all the required "mentions," and the book is made more salable because potential objections have been eliminated.

Bad writing and the "mentioning" problem are intimately related. It is hard to write well about a vast span of history in one paragraph. A scientist might call a one-page explanation of photosynthesis "inaccurate" while a writer will call it "badly written." They are both right, but they have examined the text from different perspectives. Sense and style are intimately related, and so are space and accuracy, as every newspaper reporter knows.

Some teachers defend today's outline-style textbook on the grounds that they can fill in whatever information the textbook omits. Such a defense suggests that the book is not even expected to be comprehensible on its own. Many teachers no longer see the book as material for students to read, but as a reference guide to the material that is supposed to be covered in class. They have, in effect, given up on the possibility that a textbook can be an independent source of learning.

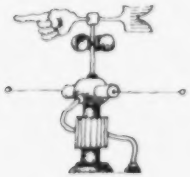
PART TWO

MUDDLE BY MANDATE
(A FICTIONALIZED ACCOUNT)

'I saw our whole program get shoved to the back of the table because our textbook box wasn't as pretty as our competitors' boxes,' the sales director says.

Reluctantly, the publishing executives agree to increase the graphics budget and allocate more space in the book to pictures. The editorial director howls with pain because more pictures mean less space for words, but the sales department prevails.

'Nobody out there reads the words anyway,' says the sales director..



An effective reform effort depends on a full understanding of the economic and political realities of how textbooks are written, published, and adopted. Before going on to our fictionalized account of a textbook's journey through the labyrinthine adoption system, wepause to explain a few basic facts.

The first and most influential reality is statewide adoption. The 22 adoption states, most of them in the South and West, usually require local districts to select from books on an official state list, even if the local district is expected to pay for them. In some states, a district may obtain a waiver or buy unapproved books out of local funds.

If a publisher can get his textbook on the state-approved list in an adoption state, he has a far better chance of selling his books in that state because they will qualify for state reimbursement to local districts that buy them.

Conversely, if he fails to get on the list, he has lost the chance to sell in a lucrative market. The economic value of state approval depends on 1) the number of books the state will adopt in any one category (the fewer, the better), 2) the number of students in the state (the more, the better), and 3) the costs incurred on the road to state approval (the lower, the better).

If a publisher can get the lion's share of sales in a big adoption state with a short list, he can probably recover the entire cost of the book's development through that one victory. The sales manager who pulls off the feat will probably be promoted in his own company or stolen by another. If, on the other hand, he fails to make the list, he may lose

his job or, in the case of a large state adoption, the company may even go under.

If Texas requires a publisher to produce a Spanish edition, to furnish a million dollars worth of free samples, to maintain an onsite sales force, to post a large bond as insurance to the state against his failure to perform, and to sustain large lobbying costs, a publisher may think twice about entering the Texas competition. Unless he believes his market share will cover his costs, he may pass up the contest.

If California asks for a book so radically different from what anyone else wants, a publisher will have to weigh the odds carefully; if he fails to get on the California list, he may not be able to sell the books elsewhere.

Another major variable in the economics of textbooks emerges from two factors. One is the timing of major adoption contests. Adoption state codes specify the length of time an adopted book will be used (the adoption cycle), and the years in which adoptions of new books will take place. Sometimes the adoption cycles of major states for particular subjects coincide, but often they do not. California, for example, may stage a math adoption in 1987 and Texas in 1989.

The effects of staggered adoption cycles on textbooks must be understood in the context of a second factor, the nearly universal insistence on a recent publication date. Thus, if a publisher prepares a math series for California in 1987, Texas may shun his book in 1989 because it is "out of date." In order to sell in as many markets as possible, publishers are increasingly driven to produce new editions frequently. New editions are now issued about every two years. Naturally, textbook publishers

prefer to stage their new editions to coincide with the adoption cycles of the more lucrative markets, like California and Texas.

New editions, though, are very costly since the manufacturing costs—not the editorial costs—are the larger share of expense. Publishers can legally qualify for a new publication date by changing only a small percentage of pages in the book, so they generally avoid extensive revisions in order to remain cost-competitive. The changes are more often cosmetic than substantive. Black and white illustrations will be upgraded to four-color plates. New pedagogical buzz words will replace old ones. But errors and anachronisms may go uncorrected. The market's blind passion for newness contributes enormously to the escalating cost of textbooks without achieving its ostensible objective—up-to-date, accurate content.

Another reality is that publishers are financially successful to the extent that they can sell in a wide variety of markets. Thus they try to produce books that will meet the criteria of the most rewarding locales. There is, however, a limit to publishers' attempts to please everyone by including everything. If the book becomes too long, then it will either be too expensive to sell or too heavy to carry. As it is, some of today's textbooks weigh about ten pounds and cost as much as $24.00.

Another constraint on publishers' attempts to sell to everyone is the "Most Favored Nation" clauses tucked into the legislation of many states and localities, especially the non-adoption states. The objective of these clauses is to negate the price advantage that was once given to adoption states in consideration of their large purchasing volume. The textbook industry may be one of the few that cannot adjust prices to individual accounts.

Defenders of the statewide adoption system claim that large volume purchases save them money. Although there is evidence that prices are slightly lower in adoption states, the savings are trivial when one considers the extravagance encouraged by law and regulation. State and local business agents may haggle over pennies or try to extract free textbooks or complimentary extras from publishers, but they preside over policies and practices that make textbooks expensive without necessarily making them good. (A summary of these expensive, but unproductive policies and practices can be found in Appendix I.)

Foremost among these costly policies is the demand for new editions; but the practice of giving the contract to the publishers with the largest package of "free" add-ons runs a close second. A freebie may consist of "free" textbooks for the first grade (designed to hook the customer into an entire series), "free" teacher editions, or "free" consumables, such as student workbooks. Industry experts now estimate that such freebies now account for about *20 percent* of the price of a book.

The practice of rewarding publishers who produce the largest array of extras is another major contributor to the cost of textbooks. Even though many districts don't buy the audio and video cassettes, the laminated maps, the globes, or other costly extras, publishers must produce them anyway in order to be competitive. Since publishers cannot absorb the cost of producing them, it is folded into the price of the basic textbook.

Fly-by-night selection procedures reward publishers who emphasize expensive packaging, covers, and graphics. Extensive content requirements make the books hefty, and therefore expensive as well.

With these fundamental dynamics in mind, we now turn to a fictionalized account of the development and adoption of a textbook. Our purpose is to show how various actors in the drama struggle with their own career demands, how they cope with absurd time constraints, and how they unknowingly contribute to the further fracturing of a structurally fractured process. Through this fictitious (but not false) account, we protect the identities of willful states, misguided experts, cunning marketeers, and overworked teachers and administrators, and try to give the reader an understanding of how textbooks have come to be the way they are despite everybody's best intentions.

The Making Of A Textbook: A Fictionalized Account

With only fourteen months to go before the next textbook adoption in the sovereign State of Nirvana, Dr. Harvey, an official in the state education agency, begins to assemble a task force of educators to draft a new set of curricular goals and objectives for reading, science, and history. The task force will produce documents that specify not only what teachers around the state should be teaching, but also what material the textbooks should cover—and in what order.

Dr. Harvey is well aware of pressures from the state legislature and the Chamber of Commerce to bring student test scores in Nirvana up to the national average. With so many other states attempting the same thing, the national average score is bound to rise. So Harvey wants to engi-

neer a rise in student achievement quickly while that average is still fairly low. The best way to do that, he thinks, is to ensure a tight correspondence between the curriculum, the test, and the textbook.

Harvey invites Dr. Helmut, the state agency's testing expert, to join the curriculum/textbook adoption task force. Helmut's background and expertise will help keep the members on task—that of raising test scores.

Both Harvey and Helmut believe that students should not be tested on material they have not had the chance to learn. Indeed, recent lawsuits have challenged test-based promotion and graduation policies on the grounds that students had not been taught the material that appeared on the test. So for both ethical and legal reasons, Harvey and Helmut are determined to align all of the elements of the program with great precision.

Harvey also invites Professor Hamilton, a leading light in the College of Education at Nirvana State University, to contribute his expertise to the task force. Hamilton recently published a paper, "A Multivariant Analysis of Canonical Word Frequencies in Junior High School Textbooks: Discourse Processing in Relation to Substance Abuse as a Special Case," and is very excited about the implications of his research for curriculum reform and textbook design. Harvey also appoints another professor, Dr. Humble from Faraway State Teachers College, to forestall criticism rising out of the rivalry between the two campuses. Dr. Henry, Superintendent of the Chipville School District, an affluent suburb of the capital city, Mylanta, is named to the task force, along with two experienced teachers from rural districts.

The two teachers, much to everybody's expressed

regret, cannot attend the first meeting of the task force because there is no money in their local districts' budgets for release time. Nevertheless, the attending members put forth an eclectic array of philosophies about subject matter and pedagogy, and everyone has strong feelings about the particulars children should know.

Harvey and Helmut are pleased when Dr. Henry from Chipville says that his community's business leaders are concerned about the "bottom line." Dr. Hamilton tosses in some impressive suggestions that nobody understands. Dr. Humble remains silent, not only because he thinks that Hamilton is talking nonsense, but also because he is seeking a teaching position at Nirvana State University and doesn't want to offend Hamilton.

Nobody at the first meeting has taught school in a number of years, and Helmut has never taught at all. His comments about testing, though, are respected because his specialty requires so many years of schooling. Harvey writes down comments, making no attempt to resolve conflicts or discrepancies, because he wants to respect everyone's input.

Before the second meeting of the task force, Harvey's superior, the Assistant Superintendent, reads the minutes of the first meeting and warns Harvey that a task force report without teacher input is likely to encounter criticism from members of the State Board. So Harvey finds state funds to pay for substitutes so the two teachers can attend the next meeting.

At the second meeting, everybody listens to the list of goals and objectives that Harvey distilled from the previous discussion. At first, the teachers are afraid to say anything in the presence of so many experts. Eventually,

though, Miss Hill makes a plea for a less congested curriculum. "There's more content on this list than my kids can get through in *twelve* years of school, let alone six," says Hill.

Dr. Henry counters with a mini-sermon about rigor and high expectations. "We have to get past this idea that the kids can't learn very much," he says. "There are low-track kids in Chipville who are doing very well in the third grade with a college prep, fast-paced curriculum."

The other teacher, Miss Holdren, is seething with rage, but speaks up in a polite, high-pitched voice. "College prep doesn't mean very much to kids who just arrived in this country," she says. "My kids barely speak English, and they need a curriculum that respects the culture they have left and also teaches them practical things, like how to make change in American money at the supermarket." None of the men on the task force want to oppose a practical idea, so nobody says anything. But Harvey doesn't write down her comments because he thinks Holdren is too sentimental for the schools of the 1980s, and secretly suspects her of closet bilingualism.

After the second meeting of the task force, Harvey and Helmut whip the input into shape for the State Board of Education's monthly meeting the following Tuesday. Helmut converts the views of the task force members—which he thinks were rather loosely expressed—into precise behavioral objectives that correspond to the items on the statewide standardized test used in Nirvana. As he teases the content into test-sized cubicles, some of the larger ideas expressed by the task force members get lost.

Also, because Helmut doesn't want to dictate the details of the content to local school districts, he concentrates on defining the skills that every Nirvana student

should know, regardless of the content used to teach it. It isn't very important, he thinks, whether kids study Greece or Mexico as long as they learn how to find the main idea, how to distinguish fact from opinion, and how to make correct inferences.

Harvey and Helmut do take one aspect of curricular content seriously: a number of national commissions, along with Dr. Hamilton, have spoken out on the need for students to know something about the history of science, especially realistic and inspirational biographies of scientists. They assemble a list of 127 scientists—from Agassiz to Young—that elementary children should study. But since there are so many scientists, only two sentences can be devoted to each. The first sentence identifies the discovery that made the scientist famous, and the second sentence—the one in which Harvey takes special pride—is designed to given the scientist a "human touch." Thus students will be expected to memorize the fact that Svante Arrhenius's teachers gave him the lowest possible passing grades, and that Wallace Carothers killed himself at 41 after his twin sister died.[5]

Responding to the teachers' concerns about books that are too hard for some students to read, Harvey tucks in a requirement that those adopted in Nirvana must be .2 below grade level on the Harbaugh Readability Index, the formula used by the state's test contractor. He and Helmut feel good about the high degree of congruence they have achieved between the curriculum, the tests, and the textbook specifications.

Harvey's superior, who wasn't present at either of the task force meetings, presents the draft curriculum/bid specifications to the Board. Half of the members have not

read the document prior to the meeting because they think that curriculum and textbooks are really professional matters rather than policy concerns.

But the member from Novisa City worries aloud about whether the students in his district can benefit from books written in English since most them speak only Spanish at home. On a four to three vote, the Board approves his motion to require publishers to produce a Spanish edition if they intend to submit textbooks for adoption in Nirvana.

The member from Mylanta, who is a local history buff, has always been irritated by the fact that textbook publishers don't even mention an important Civil War battle, which took place just outside Mylanta and was critically important, in his view, to the outcome of the Civil War. On his motion, the Board adds this battle to the list of topics to be covered in the textbook series. The member from Chipville, a prominent businessman, says his employees can't solve even simple problems and asks that "problem solving" be added to the list that already includes "critical thinking skills." The member from Ninevah warns the Board that he won't vote for any textbook that says dinosaurs are a proven fact. His motion to that effect fails, but publishers in the room take notice.

As soon as the Board approves the new curriculum and textbook specifications, as amended, twelve textbook company representatives rush the final documents back to headquarters in a hurry because the editorial staffs will have to cull through all the required topics and skills and cross-reference them with the topics and skills demanded by two other major states, Downhome and Serenity. Three smaller markets— Sequoia, Iroquois, Winnebago—are on the same adoption cycle and their needs will have to be considered too.

The editors in the twelve competing companies, however, can't really begin to write the actual text for the new series even though the printer's deadline is only six months away. Before they can begin the creative work, they need to consider the new Curriculum Framework from the State of Downhome, which is behind schedule thanks to political complications. Meanwhile, the State of Serenity has decided on a radically new approach to the curriculum. It is so distinctive that no other state would even consider buying a book based on it.

There is method in Serenity's madness. The State Superintendent not only favors the new approach; she also wants to use her state's economic clout to break up the monolithic textbook system. The Serenity market, she thinks, should be tempting enough to induce some publishers to create an enlightened alternative.

At the Harriman Company, there is a high level meeting to deal with the Serenity crisis. At the outset, the executives announce that the Board of Directors of HumongousCorp, which owns Harriman, has scotched the idea of writing a textbook series just for the Serenity market. "Too risky," they say. "If we don't make it in Serenity, we can't sell the book anywhere else." The new edition will be designed primarily for Nirvana and Downhome, but the editors are also instructed to consider the requirements of twelve other specified market areas.

The sales manager forcefully argues for spending a higher percentage of the project budget on graphic design. He points to the national trend toward all-teacher voting on textbook adoptions. In this "Astrodome method" of textbook selections, he explains, teachers converge on a large gymnasium on the appointed day. They only have time to

look at the boxes and the covers of books, and perhaps a quick flip through its pictures.

"I saw our whole program get shoved to the back of the table because our box wasn't as pretty as our competitors' boxes," he says. Reluctantly, the executives agree to increase the graphics budget and allocate more space in the book to pictures. The editorial director howls with pain because more pictures mean less space for words, but the sales department prevails. "Nobody out there reads the words anyway," says the sales director.

CALIFORNIA LEADS, BUT SOME DON'T FOLLOW

In September of 1985, when California was in the midst of a science textbook adoption, the State Board of Education attracted newspaper headlines when it ruled that no middle-school science books would be accepted unless the publishers expanded and strengthened the treatment of several topics. Foremost among those topics was biological evolution.

The publishers resubmitted their revised textbooks some months later and state agency officials in charge of the revision process apparently took it on faith that the changes made in the books satisfied California's original objections. On the night before the adoption decision, the State Board held a public hearing and was taken off guard by an out-

pouring of testimony from some 20 leading California scientists who generally found the revised versions as weak, equivocal and misleading as the original versions. The Board, which had evidently anticipated routine approval of the books, adopted all the submitted books with the proviso that publishers collaborate with the scientists to make further revisions.

Kevin Padian, a professor of paleontology at the University of California at Berkeley focused on *Heath Life Science*, generating a list of defects and suggested corrections that occupied five single-spaced sheets. In February 1986, Heath delivered a revised book that took most of Padian's suggestions into account. According to William Bennetta, a California science writer, "the new *Heath Life Science* clearly embodied great improvements in scientific accuracy, clarity, contemporaneity and (most importantly) plain honesty."

The original version, for example, had said that "Some scientists believe that strange animals roamed the earth 225 million to 65 million years ago. . . ," a passage that prompted Padian to brandish a dinosaur bone at the public hearing. Heath changed the beginning of the passage to read "Scientists have learned. . . ." The publisher corrected some simple factual errors and added material about modern evidence for the theory of evolution.

Heath has subsequently produced a new edition, *Heath Life Science*, 1987, which is identical to the

one California rejected. Since the 1987 book would not meet California's criteria, it was presumably intended for sale in the rest of the United States. Dinosaurs are once again creatures that "some" scientists "believe" in. Factual errors, like the assertion that dinosaurs were the ancestors of reptiles, have reappeared. Modern evidence supporting the theory of evolution has been omitted. Information about amino acid sequences, the banding patterns on chromosomes, and DNA, which appears in the revised 1984 California version is absent in the 1987 version.

Harriman's executives then discuss the composition of the author team. They agree that Professor Hamilton should be the senior author. Many generations of Nirvana teachers have passed through his classes at State U., and his name on the masthead will enhance sales in that critical market. Hamilton will get 5 percent of net sales. Two teachers, Carmen Hernandez from Happy Valley School District in the State of Expansion, and Herman Cummings from Intermediate School #23 in the City of Great Expectations are also signed on as authors. Both have served as officers in their national teachers associations. Both will receive a modest fee.

Also, the company signs on a long list of consultants from many strategically placed school districts around the nation. Their names will appear on the title page along with brief biographies.

The author team meets together only once at Harriman headquarters, where the project director gives them guidelines on how to proceed. They are instructed to follow the format used by the best-selling series. He passes out copies of the outline which encompasses the requirements of the 14 target market areas and tells them to follow it.

They receive a list of words and images to be avoided: junk food, conflict with parents, minorities doing farm work, cantankerous old people, dinosaurs, women wearing the color pink, wine bottles on cafe tables, too much leg, church spires, and flawed American heroes. They are also given a list of items that must be included: kindness to animals, active senior citizens, minorities in professional roles, the work ethic, and flawed American heroes. Each author is expected to write the text for two books in the six-book series.

The teacher guide, which is the most important part of the program, will be done in-house. The peripherals—workbooks, skill sheets, test pack, audio tapes, videotapes, and maps—will be farmed out to contractors. Harriman's executives know that adoption committees look with favor on companies that produce a large array of extras. Although most local school districts won't actually buy most of these products, the sales force can offer them as freebies to wavering adoption committees. The costs, of course, can be passed on to buyers in the form of higher prices for the student text.

The project director hires a number of retired teachers and housewives to produce a "Correlational Analysis" for every jurisdiction that demands one. They will cross-reference, by page number, every topic, fact, and skill the

jurisdiction wants mentioned or plans to test. In order to get the work done on time, the correlators will have to begin their work before the authors turn in their manuscripts, so inevitably, there will be many errors in the documents. But Harriman's executives know that few administrators or adoption committees actually have time to read the document, let alone check its accuracy. Producing the analysis is expensive and nearly useless, but it has become a business necessity and the cost can be passed on to the buyers.

When the authors' deadline arrives, only Cummings has completed his assignment. He wrote some good lessons and developed some interesting activities, but his prose is jargon-filled and will require extensive editing. Hamilton's mother died and he only had time to prepare an outline. At the last minute, Hernandez, whose district is flat broke, was saddled with three new courses to prepare for and couldn't carve out the time.

Caught with only three months to produce camera-ready copy, Harriman's project director executes a contract with a "production shop," whose business it is to rescue textbook publishers in times of crisis. The staff at the production shop is experienced, but there are no subject matter experts on its payroll. In order to make sure the content and pedagogy are consistent with current practice in the field, they must reach out to working teachers in a nearby school district.

These newly hired teachers come to the production shop every afternoon, weary from a full day of teaching. They work late into the night and several weekends to pull together the six manuscripts.

These actual authors, like those whose names will

appear as authors, have no previous experience writing textbooks. Although they know a great deal about teaching, they have never written for publication before. The head of the production shop is thrown into shock when he receives the manuscripts. Their writing is either amateurish or exceeds the allowable readability score. He must hurriedly rewrite what they have submitted, chopping sentences in two and excising interesting words because Harriman threatens to hold up payment until the readability score is lowered.

In the meanwhile, the Nirvana State Board of Education has appointed 17 members to the State Adoption Committee. There is one member from each congressional district in the state. Since service on the State Adoption Committee is seen as a polite form of political patronage, the job is passed around as frequently as possible. According to the state statute, no member is allowed to serve more than once. Since nobody on the adoption committee has ever served on one before, none has any experience with the process or expertise in textbook evaluation.

Back at Harriman Brothers, the editorial staff must scratch plans to field-test the materials on students because the project is behind schedule. They feverishly rush the copy and artwork to the manufacturer hours before their deadline. The entire creative process—from the first word written to final delivery to the manufacturer—has been accomplished in six weeks.

Just in time, the manufacturer delivers $500,000 worth of free samples to a warehouse in Mylanta. The warehouse is a family business that enjoys a profitable contract with the Nirvana State Education Agency, and its owners make liberal contributions to both political parties.

The warehouse director then ships each member of the State Adoption Committee a complete set of materials being considered for adoption in Nirvana that year. Since all of the members are new to the task, they are completely unprepared for the consequences of being "sampled." When the truck arrives from the warehouse, each member will find it necessary to empty out the garage or the family room in order to house the textbooks and all their accompanying extras. The pile is so daunting that few members dare to touch the books.

At the first meeting, Harvey tells the members what is required of them: they are not to accept calls, gifts, or visits from publishers' representatives; they must complete their work in 60 days so the Board can act on their recommendations in time for the opening of school in September.

The members go home with copies of Helmut's 879 behavioral objectives and Nirvana's standard textbook evaluation rating sheet with 102 items to be ranked on a scale of 1 to 5. Back in their homes, committee members leaf through the mass of materials aimlessly, not sure of what to look for. Some members alight on pages they don't understand. Some of them conclude that things must have changed quite a bit since they were young, and others conclude that they are too tired to tackle the task and go to bed.

At the next meeting, the committee members begin to fill out their rating sheets. The subcommittee on race and gender proposes the elimination of two books because too many of the females pictured are in passive poses. Although some of the other members secretly think that is a trivial reason, they go along with the subcommittee's proposal because it cuts down the number of books they have to evaluate.

The subcommittee on curricular congruence skims the tables of contents, the chapter heads, the indexes, and the glossaries. The state agency curriculum specialist, who heads that subcommittee, wants to eliminate one textbook series because the cross-reference to critical-thinking skills in the publisher's explanatory materials only lists 32 references to teaching "main idea," while all the other series have no fewer than 72 references.

The committee has 10 series (60 books) left to consider. Since the main thing is to get the rating sheets filled out, though, the members don't have time to read the books. Of the 17 members, only one has actually read an entire chapter in each of 10 third-grade books. The others have actually read no more than three contiguous pages in any of the books. Through many frustrating hours, the members assign high or low marks to "eye appeal," "convenience," "durability," "author credentials," and "content." The members wonder why they are asked to rate "publication date" on a scale of 1 to 5, especially since all of the books bear the same date—next year's.

When Harvey tallies the results, most members are surprised to find that some of the books they liked best didn't even rank in the top five. Harvey prepares a report on the committee's recommendations and sends it to the State Textbook Officer.

Meanwhile, the representative of the publisher whose book came in sixth in the rankings is tipped off by a friendly member of the committee. Desperate to get his book on the list, the representative goes to the State Textbook Officer and offers him a deal. If his book can get on the list, his company will give away, entirely free, first and second-grade student books for every child in Nirvana.

After consulting with his superiors, the Textbook Officer revises the committee's recommendations, putting the sixth-ranked book in fifth place, and removing the fifth-ranked book from the list to be forwarded to the Board for approval. He feels good about what he has done. The state will save a considerable amount of money, and times are hard in Nirvana.

When the committee members find out that the Textbook Officer has tampered with their ratings, most of them are furious. Some members start a rumor campaign about cronyism between state officials and textbook executives, but other members, who couldn't see any remarkable differences between the textbooks anyway, think that the last minute substitution is a fine idea because it saves money.

At a raucous public hearing before the State Board, a colorful array of special pleaders make theatrical presentations favoring or criticizing the books proposed for adoption, and the Board approves the list of books forwarded by the Textbook Officer. Representatives of the winning companies are jubilant, but the losers go home to prepare new resumes.

Meanwhile, in the small city of Faraway, the Superintendent plans a local textbook adoption process. He has become weary of complaints from teachers who say they were not consulted, so he devises a plan to let all teachers vote on the books to be chosen from the state-approved list. The teachers are invited to stop by the high school gym after school to examine the books and cast their votes.

When the teachers filter into the gym, they are met with a glittering array of materials and a battalion of charming, handsome salesmen. As they finger the books,

the salesmen cluster around, promoting the ease and convenience of their respective programs. "With our system, you don't even need to write lesson plans. It's all here in the Teacher Edition," says one. "Our tests are self-correcting; that can save you a lot of time," says another. "The teacher guide is loose leaf," says a third, "no need to carry a heavy book home with you." (A sixty-pound student, however, will be expected to lug the book between school and home.)

The teachers flip through the books, struck by the beautiful pictures placed on the outside edges of the pages, and mark their ballots. One company's series gets a low vote because there is too much white on one of the covers and some teachers think the book will look dirty too soon. The winning series is an updated version of the book they are already using in Faraway; most teachers dread the idea of developing new lesson plans for an unfamiliar book. Many of the sample copies from other publishers are returned with their cellophane wrappers still intact.

The superintendent is proud of himself for having discovered a democratic solution to the problem of textbook selection. The teachers "own" their choice, and they will be happy with it. Everyone rests in the security that all the books on the state-approved list have already been screened by the state adoption committee, and they know the book they have chosen will support the state testing program.

Two months later, students all over the state open up their beautiful, sweet-smelling new books. A first grader in Chipville opens his book and reads:

"Rabbit said: `I can run. I can run fast. You can't run fast.' Turtle said, `Look Rabbit. See the park. You and I will

run . . . ."

Soon the child is gazing out the window at the clouds in the Nirvana sky.

A fifth grader in Mylanta reads his assigned chapter and discovers that all the answers to the questions at the end are in the chapter summary. After the first lesson, he learns to skip the chapters entirely, which are boring and confusing anyway, and to read just the summary. He can get rid of homework questions in just a few minutes. "Did you really do your homework that fast?" asks his mother. "Yes, Mom. Now can I watch television?" he asks.

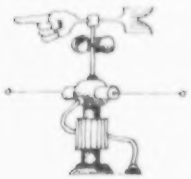
As the year goes by, the teachers in Faraway discover that the kids aren't reading their textbook assignments. A few teachers blame it on "home problems," or television watching, but most of them conclude that the books are too difficult. These teachers form a committee to write to the State Board requesting that readability formulas be lowered in the next adoption.

Some teachers, though, know that their students won't read the books because they are unreadable. They are insulted by the scripts in the teacher edition, which say, "Open the book to page 251, hold it up before the class, and say, `This map on page 251 shows the nations of Europe.'" Some of the best teachers in Nirvana make plans to leave teaching and go into real estate.

PART THREE

REFORMING TEXTBOOKS

There is overwhelming evidence that formula-driven prose is bad for children and bad for education. There is also evidence that writers with a record of successful writing for young audiences often refuse to work for textbook publishers because they cannot tolerate the absurd restrictions that readability formulas impose on them.



What must happen if textbooks are to be improved? How can this ponderous system, in which so many people are doing things they believe to be good, useful, and necessary, be changed for the benefit of students?

First and foremost, every adoption state governor, legislator, state board member, chief state school officer, and state agency official must recognize the paradox at the center of the textbook dilemma:

> **The harder they try to regulate the content of textbooks, the less useful textbooks become for their own students and students elsewhere in the United States.**

A tight congruence between curriculum, tests, and textbooks is an excellent idea in theory. In the other nations of the world, where there is a central ministry of education that formulates a national curriculum, the idea is practical. Publishers can compete with one another to produce a book that closely parallels the national program of study. But in the United States, where there are dozens of little ministries of education, each defining its own unique curriculum, the idea of curricular congruence has become a bad neighbor policy. All the adoption states and many large local school districts contribute to the thinning out and dumbing down of textbooks used all over the nation.

Leaders in many jurisdictions quietly crow over their power to influence publishers, but evidence of that influence is gathered by checking on the mere presence of a list of particulars—often by computerized key-word searches. When a publisher's success in the market is determined by such a mechanism, textbooks become an incomprehensible mosaic of bits and pieces.

Many critics of the textbook system advocate the abolition of the state adoption system, but rarely do these critics live in such states. In those 22, state pride is alive and well, and the tradition of statewide control over education is long and deep. Moreover, an educational reform movement is in full swing in most of those states, and political leaders are unlikely to surrender control over any available levers of reform. Thus we stop short of recommending the abolition of statewide textbook selection and purchasing for two reasons: it is politically unrealistic, and we cannot foresee the consequences.

Instead, we propose a deregulation strategy for adoption states in the belief that rescinding harmful laws and regulations, and creating more skillful policies and practices, is the most practical strategy at this moment.

Recommendation To Policymakers In Adoption States

RECOMMENDATION I:

Adoption-state Policymakers Should Detach Their Curriculum and Testing Programs From Their Textbook Adoption Policies. Put Another Way, Adoption State Leaders Should Cease the Practice of Issuing Detailed, Skill-oriented Bid Specifications to Publishers.

New York State provides a model for this approach. Although populous and capable of exerting pre-publication influence over textbooks, as Texas and California do, New York has declined to become an adoption state. And although New York, like other states, has defined statewide curricular objectives and maintains a statewide testing program, it does not issue bid specifications to publishers, nor is the Regents Exam mandatory. But many parents want their children to take the Regents Exam because college admissions officers recognize its value. Thus teachers in New York have a strong incentive to teach the state curriculum and impart the knowledge it requires. Similarly, publishers have a strong incentive to consider New York's curriculum and testing program; some even prepare books specifically designed for New York. But authors and editors are not compelled to add hundreds of particular facts, skills, and pseudo-skills to those already required byhighly prescriptive adoption states. Thus New York asserts its power, but does not contribute as much to the "mentioning" problem as do adoption states.

New York makes no attempt to pre-select the textbooks used by local school districts. Relying on the motivating force of the state curricular guidelines and testing program, it trusts its local districts to choose materials best suited to realize state goals in the local setting.

New York's statewide textbook policy structure reflects an understanding of the political dynamics of school district policymaking. Textbooks don't vote; neither do they go out on strike. Because textbooks have no audible constituency, local school boards are often tempted to slash the instructional materials account. New York re-

moves that temptation by ear-marking state monies for local textbook purchases. By providing state funding for textbooks, New York guarantees an equitable supply of up-to-date textbooks for students in rich and poor districts alike. Unfortunately, local school districts in New York, as in the other 28 non-adoption states, must choose from among textbooks that have been misshapen by the regulatory excesses of the adoption states.

RECOMMENDATION II:

Immediately, and Everywhere, Adoption-State Policymakers Should Abandon the Use of Readability Formulas As an Adoption Criterion.

There is overwhelming evidence that formula-driven prose is bad for children and bad for education. There is also evidence that writers with a record of successful writing for young audiences often refuse to work for textbook publishers because they cannot tolerate the absurd restrictions that readability formulas impose on them.

It is not enough for policymakers to remove readability formulas from law and regulation. The typical rating sheet asks textbook evaluators to judge the reading level of the book, and teachers have become accustomed to using a formula to make that judgment. Policymakers and administrators in both adoption and non-adoption states— perhaps with help from foundations and university researchers—need to create more sensitive procedures for ensur-

ing a match between the book and the child's reading ability. They must actively train teachers to use their own judgment, or else select adoption committee members with proven ability to judge reading levels accurately.

RECOMMENDATION III:

Adoption State Policymakers Must Stop Demanding a Recent Publication Date.

This requirement, whether formal or informal, contributes more than any other requirement to the soaring costs of textbooks and at the same time, deprives publishers of the time they need to develop textbooks of high quality. This mindless insistence on a new publication date forces publishers into hasty revisions. Editors don't have time to polish the prose, seek factual critiques from content experts, or test their products on students in time to make appropriate revisions.

Until very recently, educators defended this curious passion for newness in the belief that a new date guaranteed up-to-date content, but there is so much evidence against this belief that one rarely hears this justification anymore. More recently, the practice is defended on the grounds that parents will object to an old book. To the extent that this is a real concern, we urge educators to assume responsibility for the forthright defense of good books. We also suggest that adoption cycles be shortened for those such as science, where newness has some importance, and lengthened for other subjects, such as grammar or literature, where newness has limited value.

RECOMMENDATION IV:

Adoption State Policymakers Should Appoint People to Adoption Committees and Selection Panels on the Basis of Their Knowledge and Talents, and Not Only on the Basis of Their Geographic Location, Their Institutional Role, or Their Organizational Affiliation.

Committees should be designed so that teachers, administrators, content specialists, and university professors can collaborate with generalists and representatives from special interest groups in ways that ensure a thorough and balanced review of books under consideration.

There is no such thing as a generic textbook. People selected to evaluate specific subject-area textbooks should have specific knowledge of that subject. Policymakers need to tailor the selection of adoption committee members to the subject at hand.

Geographic and institutional representation are valid criteria, but a teacher member of an adoption committee can both represent a section of the state (or a specific bargaining unit) and also bring specialized knowledge or experience.

Administrators may be experts in the management of the educational program, and teachers may be experts in teaching, but administrators and teachers—or for that matter, curriculum specialists and professors of education—are not likely to be content experts. State policy should provide for the participation of bona fide scholars in the subject area under consideration. Without their

participation, factual errors, anachronisms, and inconsistencies now common are likely to persist.

Intelligent generalists and special-interest group representatives also play a valid role in textbook selection but that role should be collaborative, not determinative. A selection process that permits special-interest group representatives to exercise veto power over textbooks based on a single criterion is unwise. A good textbook adoption policy should be designed so that representatives of minority groups, women's groups, or public interest lobbies are expected to consider the overall merits of a textbook as well as their own special concerns.

State policy should not limit service on an adoption committee to a single cycle. The process will be strengthened by the presence of members with experience and institutional memory. Since "old hands" tend to acquire biases in favor of particular publishers or books, good policy will also require a judicious mixture of new members with fresh viewpoints and no attachments.

RECOMMENDATION V:

Provide Substantive Training for Adoption Committee Members.

Members can be expert in academic subjects without being expert in the analysis of textbooks. For that reason, a good statewide adoption policy will provide training, not only on procedural matters, as is now typical, but also on the special issues related to the subject matter under consideration.

Members should be provided with a dispassionate summary of the research—both old and new—on the teaching and learning issues inherent in that subject. Teachers on the committee should be invited to comment on their experiences—both positive and negative—with current textbooks, and on the aspects of their subject that students have the most difficulty learning. The committee should consider alternative ways to teach the required material—whether through a textbook, a trade book, lecture, discussion, peer interaction, activities, computer-assisted instruction, film, or other modes and methods.

Any serious training program requires both time and money. An hysterical legislative mandate to install a videotaped, one-size-fits-all training program in six months is doomed.

RECOMMENDATION VI:

Pay Teachers Who Serve on Adoption Committees, or Else Find Other Ways to Recognize and Reward Those Who Perform This Important Task.

Selecting textbooks is serious business, but policymakers don't send a serious message when they expect teachers to do the job in their spare time without compensation or recognition. Under the present structure, teachers become cynical about the process; they are given a pile of books that have been pre-selected by higher-ups, and then not given enough time to examine the books thoughtfully. If their verdicts can be overturned by superiors with undisclosed motives, they become even more cynical about the process. Adopting authorities serious about the

quality of instructional materials will allocate funds to pay teachers for the time it takes to do a serious job, or else provide non-monetary compensations that teachers value.

RECOMMENDATION VII:

Throw Away Long, Generic Checklists.

The checklist approach, by its very nature, discourages both thought and judgment. Long, unprioritized checklists give too much weight to superficial aspects of a textbook, and too little weight to the really important dimensions of quality. The sheer impossibility of applying so many criteria (an average of 70 items, according to a study by Jackie Comas of Indiana University[6]) to a deep stack of books corrupts textbook selection. Raters either give artificially high marks to preconceived favorites, get bogged down in trivia, or judge books on the basis of graphics or the charm of the salesman's pitch.

Administrators might prefer the convenience of a checklist that can be applied to both horticulture and grammar textbooks, but the items that apply to both will almost certainly be limited to trivial matters and fail to capture important content-specific issues.

RECOMMENDATION VIII:

Write It Yourself.

If an adoption state is determined to have a textbook that covers every jot and tittle on its list of behavioral objectives and test specifications, or feels strongly about re-

specting some powerful constituency with a strong ideological position, then it should let a sole-source contract to a reputable publishing house or a well-known author who will treat that state's curriculum coherently and in depth. There is ample precedent for this practice. Most states commission their own state histories. A "write it yourself" policy, more broadly applied, would permit each state to get the textbook it wanted without muddying the waters for everyone else. With the prospect of guaranteed sales, a publisher with a sole-source contract could afford to sustain the developmental costs required to produce a meaningful book.

RECOMMENDATION IX:

State Policymakers Should Devise Meaningful Sanctions Against State or Local School Personnel Who Seek or Accept Free Editions or Other Extras.

Although a number of states have tried to stop the practice, none has yet succeeded. The freebie phenomenon has reached criminal proportions. The practice of bargaining with textbook salesmen for "free" materials not only corrupts the process of textbook selection, but significantly increases the cost of textbooks—by an average now estimated by industry experts to be in the realm of 20 percent. Nothing short of a suspension of professional license is likely to stop the practice.

RECOMMENDATION X:

Establish and Implement a New, Subject Specific Policy Framework for Curriculum Review and Textbook Selection With Two Central Objectives; Selecting Books on the Basis of Qualities That are Known to Benefit Students, and Rewarding Publishers who Produce Such Books.

This will not be an easy task because all the adult participants in the present system have grown accustomed to viewing the adoption process from their own political, institutional, or professional perspectives.

In many places, elected officials respond to demands from interest groups to add items to the curriculum and textbooks. Yielding to these demands, whether they are worthy or unworthy, undermines the academic and artistic integrity of textbooks, even as it brings policymakers a pleasing sense of their own responsiveness. If states stop specifying the details of textbook content, there will be no crumbs to throw to the endless parade of special pleaders.

No thoughtful person would envy the elected officials caught up in volatile controversies over censorship. The line between tasteful selection and censorship is exceedingly thin and difficult to draw. Everyone wants children to learn the facts of science, and nobody wants to undermine a child's religious faith. Caught between opposing and intransigent forces, elected officials have become accustomed to protecting themselves by telling publishers to talk out of both sides of their mouths.

Against their better judgment, teachers have been bullied into choosing books that promise to make their students—and themselves—look good on standardized tests of rudimentary skills. And because teaching has become so stressful, salesmen easily have wooed teachers into an ethic of personal convenience.

Members of state boards are accustomed to the privilege of grooming political allies for higher political service by appointing them to adoption committees.

Special interest groups have become accustomed to exercising veto power over books with allegedly offensive particulars and reporting these dubious victories to supporters. Changing everyone's assumptions about the purpose of a textbook will require a creative reconciliation of existing power arrangements with new understandings about how students learn. (See Part Four)

RECOMMENDATION XI:

Allocate State Funds for Textbook Purchases at the Local Level, and Earmark Some of the Funds for the Development of an Enhanced Selection Process.

In all too many school districts across the nation, there are simply too few materials for children to learn from. The problem is more acute in districts with large ethnic minorities and high percentages of new immigrant children. According to current predictions, the academic and cultural range of student populations will widen in the coming years. If school districts are to be successful at

educating their students, they must have the resources to provide a variety of material appropriate to the needs of a varied student population. As things stand now, most districts have the resources to buy only one book per subject and grade.

Recommendations for National Academic Organizations

RECOMMENDATION I:

National Organizations of Teachers and/or Professors in the Various Disciplines Should Define a Coherent Curriculum, or Several Alternative Coherent Curricula, That Can Be Taught by the Teachers We Have in the Time Allotted.

National organizations of subject-matter teachers have contributed to the "mentioning" problem by default. Organizations of public school teachers in a particular discipline, as well as professional societies in higher education, have failed to articulate a manageable educational program for elementary and secondary students. (The exception is the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics, which has done an excellent job of defining an ideal mathematics program.)

Since these organizations usually survive on the support they receive from membership dues, it is understandable that their leaders step carefully around disagree-

ments between and among sub-specialties and schools of thought within their fields. For the sake of the children, though, these subject-matter organizations need to mount forthright debates between competing conceptions within their own fields, encourage exchanges of ideas with practitioners in other disciplines, and support scholarly synthesis wherever possible.

Clearly, academic organizations lack the power to impose a curriculum on any jurisdiction; but their training and experience should give their recommendations some standing with school authorities who want to improve their academic programs.

RECOMMENDATION II:

Those Responsible for Ethical Standards in Various Fields Should Specifically Discourage Professors and Teachers Who Agree to Be Listed As Authors (and Accept Royalties or Fees) For Textbooks They Did Not Actually Write.

When professors or teachers sell their names (rather than their manuscripts) in order to help publishers sell textbooks, they not only misrepresent themselves, but also participate in false advertising. Worse, nobody can really be held accountable for the accuracy or inaccuracy of the book's contents, or for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the book.

University experts can and should be asked to consult on the scope of a textbook, provide outlines, or review content, and they should be compensated for their work. They should not, however, be listed as authors.

RECOMMENDATION III:

Academic Organizations Should Develop Model Contracts for Professors or Teachers who Actually Do Write Textbooks. These Contracts Should Retain for the Author the Right to Control Subsequent Editions.

Excellent textbooks written by talented authors have sometimes become unrecognizable in subsequent editions even though they continue to bear the name of the original author. For the sake of truth in advertising, as well as for accountability, authors should retain the right to review subsequent revisions, and if not satisfied, they should have the power to remove their names from the title page.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOUNDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION I:

Foundations Should Support Efforts to Develop Sound Methods for Assessing the Effectiveness of Textbooks.

At present, there is no intellectually defensible method of verifying the effects of a book on learners because school officials have generally surrendered the task to the publishers, who use field trials as a sales strategy. Until school systems have a valid, economical method for testing books on students, their efforts to put student interests ahead of all others will be hampered.

RECOMMENDATION II:

Foundations Should Support Independent, Critical Reviews of Textbooks in General Circulation Magazines and Newspapers.

At present, textbooks are reviewed only in technical journals with small circulations, if they are reviewed at all. Educational journals generally avoid serious textbook reviews because they depend upon advertisements from textbook publishers and fear the potential financial consequences of critical review.

Also, the associations that publish these small journals sometimes depend on exhibitor fees from textbook publishers to support their annual conventions. For these understandable reasons, textbook reviews sometimes read like content summaries rather than critical reviews.

In England, daily newspapers sometimes publish serious reviews of elementary and secondary textbooks written by leading intellectuals. In the United States, the general public has no parallel opportunity to know how independent observers view the textbooks that children are reading. American textbooks are not sold in bookstores, nor are they available in public libraries. Local school districts rarely have spare copies to lend an interested parent or citizen. Unless one is a potential volume purchaser, it is even difficult to buy a textbook directly from the publisher.

Foundations should nurture the development of a new American art form—a 300-500 word review, written by notable scholars or journalists, on the content and style of American textbooks. If possible, there should be several reviews written by experts on various aspects of a textbook or subject, or team reviews. The reviewers, and possibly the publications that print the reviews, may need to be subsidized until the practice becomes an institution. Reviews of this kind would help bring American textbooks out of the closet, where they currently reside, and also inform the members of textbook adoption committees.

RECOMMENDATION III:

Foundations Should Support the Establishment and Maintenance of a Center for Textbook Studies and Textbook Reform.

If adoption committees are going to look more deeply into textbooks, they need better information. A national center should collect and disseminate studies related to teaching and learning in various subject areas and studies related to the characteristics of effective textbooks in various categories. (The Center for the Study of Readying at the University of Illinois already does some aspects of the work envisioned here.) The center should prepare dispassionate summaries of relevant research and assist states and localities that want to redesign their policy structure and selection procedures.

RECOMMENDATION IV:

Foundations Should Support Efforts to Develop Better Tests.

The current reliance on multiple-choice, short-answer tests pulls down the level of both instruction and textbooks. Until we have more sophisticated ways of checking on children's understanding of complex ideas and process, and better ways of assessing complex tasks such as writing and problem solving, efforts to reform both curriculum and textbooks will be hampered.

Recommendations For School Districts in Non-adoption States

School personnel in non-adoption states tend to see themselves as victims of large adoption-state politics. Insofar as the textbooks prepared for the national market are skewed toward the ideological sensitivities of Texas, California, and the deep South, non-adoption states truly are victims.

In many ways, however, school districts in non-adoption states are perpetrators as well as victims. More often than not, they imitate the behavior of the large adoption states: they demand newly minted books; they apply readability formulas; they use long, unfocused checklists; they succumb to freebies; they buy the glitter and ignore the gold; they place a higher value on teacher convenience and test congruence than they do on intellectual integrity and good writing. Their administrators are as anxious about test scores as are administrators in the adoption states; their teachers are as fearful and overburdened as teachers elsewhere. With few exceptions, school district policies and practices in non-adoption states reinforce all the worst tendencies observed in the adoption states.

Moreover, school officials in non-adoption state districts ignore the freedom they could enjoy. Unlike local school officials in adoption states, they are free to buy textbooks from small but worthy publishing houses; to substitute interesting trade books or supplementary materials for boring textbooks; to give—rather than loan—cheap paperbacks to students and buy new ones the

following year. But for the most part, they don't do any of these things. Instead, they tend to limit themselves to the overstuffed, homogenized, expensive textbooks prepared for the big markets. Therefore, we advocate the following:

RECOMMENDATION I:

Local School Districts in Non-adoption States Should Redesign Their Textbook Adoption Policies and Procedures so that the Negative Practices of Adoption States Are Not Reinforced.

RECOMMENDATION II:

Local School Districts Should Create New, Subject-Specific Criteria For Textbook Selection.

Teachers at each grade level and in each subject area, with the help of carefully chosen experts in or out of the school system, should be encouraged to discuss qualitative issues and mechanisms for translating their concerns into textbook selection criteria.

Because local school districts in non-adoption states are freer to innovate, these districts should experiment with creative policy designs, sophisticated training for textbook judges, and ingenious uses of teacher time, and then tell the world about their reforms.

RECOMMENDATION III:

Local School Districts in Non-adoption States Should Appoint Adoption Committee Members on the Basis of Merit and Knowledge, Train them for the Specific Adoption under Consideration, Provide Them With Adequate Time To Do the Work Thoughtfully, and Reward Them for Their Services.

RECOMMENDATION IV:

Local School Districts in Non-adoption States Should Encourage by Their Purchasing Practices the More Venturesome and Less Expensive Offerings of Small Publishers, Use Trade Books and Original Source Materials, and Otherwise Exercise the Freedom They Have.

RECOMMENDATION V:

Local School Districts in Non-adoption States Should Devise Sanctions Against Employees Who Seek or Accept Free Editions or Other Extras From Publishers.

Recommendations To Teacher Unions

Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, has said that teachers should have more control over the selection of the tools of their profession, not simply because they are professionals, but because they know more than other people know. However, at present, says Shanker, they do not know more. We agree.

RECOMMENDATION I:

The NEA and the AFT, Through Their Local Affiliates, Should Organize Content-specific Textbook Study Groups.

The workshops should enable teachers to share their experiences with textbooks with a candor that is currently discouraged by all too many administrators. The workshops should equip teachers with state-of- the art knowledge about the characteristics of textbooks that promote student understanding and enjoyment of the subject.

RECOMMENDATION II:

The NEA and the AFT Should Promote Alternative Methods for Judging the Reading Level of a Textbook.

Developing in teachers well-warranted confidence in their own judgment about text difficulty would kill two birds with one stone: it would raise teachers' self-esteem

and liberate authors and editors from the oppressive effects of readability formulas.

RECOMMENDATION III:

As the textbook reform movement unfolds, the NEA and the AFT should press for more teacher control over textbook selection.

Eventually, if not now, skilled principals and teachers should have primary responsibility for establishing selection criteria so they can have authority commensurate with the responsibility they have been given by society. Unlike the other learned professions, though, teachers should not have sole control over the tools of their trade. Because the public schools are the public's schools, teachers will always need to share some of the responsibility with school boards and parents. The most professional way to achieve this is to develop sensitivity to community standards concerning morals, ethics, and literary taste. At the same time, professionalism calls for teachers to master the skill of making a dignified, articulate defense—in standard English—of books that are unfairly attacked.

The current preoccupation of teachers with convenience must be balanced with an informed and professional concern with the students' need to have truly engaging, memorable material to read in school. When teachers shift their priorities from convenience to coherence, from good scripting to good writing, they will have the moral authority to demand, and get, professional recompense for the work of selection and substantial control over their primary professional tool.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PUBLISHERS

Publishing houses are businesses, and their first imperative is to remain solvent, however much their executives may personally yearn to produce an excellent but unprofitable textbook. Ultimately, it is the elected and appointed officials in general and school governments who must be held accountable for buying good textbooks for students. But there are a few small risks we think publishers could take without jeopardizing sales in the current, malignant environment.

RECOMMENDATION I:

Publishers Should Employ True Subject-matter Scholars—as Opposed to Public School Teachers or Education Professors--to Review Textbook Content for Factual Accuracy, Conceptual Integrity, and Value.

When textbook editors disagree with content scholars about the distinction between factual accuracy and necessary simplification, the two parties should discuss the legitimate boundaries of simplification and resolve the problem with language acceptable to both.

RECOMMENDATION II:

Publishers Should Hire Authors Who Have Demonstrated Their Ability to Write Clear and Engaging Text for Mass Audiences.

We question whether author teams chosen for their presumed market value really do enhance sales.

RECOMMENDATION III:

Publishers Should Write or Select Good Material First, and Then Figure Out How to Use That Material to Foster Vocabulary Growth, Test Achievement, and Critical Thinking.

The ideal balance between content and skill development varies according to grade level and subject, and clearly skill development plays a larger role in early elementary education. Nevertheless, publishers need to pay more attention to the cultural content of elementary reading and social studies books, and reconcile the skills/content polarity more creatively. Although most publishers do this some of the time, few of them do it all the time. Culturally significant material, whether fiction or fact, has achieved significance because it plucks the important chords of memory and meaning. Ultimately, important content will do more to help children learn to become skilled readers and thinkers than will material designed around narrowly defined, disembodied skills.

RECOMMENDATION IV:

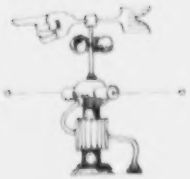
Publishers Should Become More Realistic About the Time it Takes to Produce a Good Book.

Pretending that fully employed authors—especially those with no experience in this field—will actually produce usable manuscripts on time is an example of an unrealistic practice. Another fantasy is the idea that a far-flung group of poorly coordinated contractors and subcontractors can produce a coherent textbook program in a few months. Longer timetables and better management would improve the quality of the product without increas-

PART FOUR

An Ideal Textbook Adoption Process

More weight should be given to
the book's overall academic integrity,
its depth and clarity, the quality of its prose,
its factual accuracy, and its capacity
to motivate and stimulate students,
than to test congruence,
"ease of use," and
management
aids.



A textbook adoption process takes place in a policy context. An ideal policy would recognize that good books are ends in themselves, not merely servants of powerful public agencies. A book worth reading is an art form, and the artist/author must have some freedom to organize a textbook around some integral conception and must have some latitude in selecting exemplars of principles, topics, literary genres, or scientific processes in accordance with an overall theme.

The ideal policy structure places the student's interests above all others. Good teacher manuals are important, but too much emphasis on manuals will ultimately weaken teachers and the teaching profession as a whole. Good ancillary materials can save busy teachers a lot of time, but time is of little avail if students don't profit from the basic textbook.

An ideal textbook policy would not expect any one book to illuminate all parts of the curriculum or serve all student populations. It is therefore unwise, and even destructive, for any jurisdiction to strive for an exact match between the book and its own unique requirements or to impose one textbook on everyone arbitrarily. Rather, it should make specific provisions for the purchase of other materials (other textbooks, trade books, district-made materials, etc.) or other strategies (laboratory experiments, direct experience, community service, etc.) to teach those elements of the curriculum that are not best taught through reading or not well treated in available textbooks. To do otherwise is to expect more of textbooks than they can possibly deliver, and to subordinate curriculum, the teachers, and the students to the textbooks.

Begin With A Review Of The Curriculum

An ideal textbook adoption process is subject-specific and begins with a local review of the subject area or grade level that is the object of the upcoming textbook adoption. A prior analysis of the existing curriculum, its goals and challenges, puts textbook selection in its proper perspective: the curriculum, not the textbooks, should drive instruction. Beginning with an analysis and revision (if warranted) of the curriculum not only helps a local adoption committee select appropriate materials, it also helps the administrators and teachers on the adoption committee capture and articulate their experience and develop a common vision for the future.

A legitimate curriculum review process cannot be a two-hour meeting in which the supervisor marches the participants through the state and local requirements—on the dubious assumption that curriculum will be strengthened by a reading of the document. A meaningful review process takes place in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between administrators and teachers and is based on the assumption that both have some useful insights to share with one another.

Composition Of The Committee

The composition of the curriculum/adoption committee will vary according to circumstances, but its mem-

bers ought to be selected primarily because of their knowledge, and secondarily because of their role or organizationalaffiliation. Teachers on the committee should be a mixture of seasoned and new teachers, and represent a variety of student populations and teaching conditions.

Administrators on the committee should not dominate the process, but neither should they be left out. Principals are the key implementors of any new textbook program, and they need to be fully committed to the process and its results so they can provide the leadership and resources to make the curriculum and textbooks work properly.

Parents and community members should also serve on the committee for a number of reasons:

First, their participation helps the school district feel the pulse of the community, especially in curriculum areas that touch community sensibilities.

Second, when adopted textbooks are subsequently attacked by ideologues or single-issue groups, those laymen who have served on the committee make a more credible defense of the committee's choices than school personnel do.

Third, judiciously selected community members can supply expertise that may not be available within the school system. Local businessmen who hire recent graduates may know more about what students do and don't know than school personnel. Local college professors know how well students are prepared for college work. Since teachers (or even subject matter specialists) are rarely scholars, a true content scholar from a nearby university can bring state-of-the-art knowledge to the cur-

riculum review, and ultimately, help spot factual errors in textbooks under consideration. Because the quality of writing in textbooks is a critical factor in student comprehension and retention, a local newspaper reporter, editor, or published author—someone who writes for general audiences—should be asked to help the committee evaluate writing quality.

In many cases, it is possible for a community member simultaneously to supply special knowledge and represent a particular constituency in the community. The local chapter of the National Organization for Women or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, for example, might be asked to send someone with content knowledge, writing expertise, or teaching experience.

Students should also be involved in the process. In the case of elementary textbook adoptions, teachers on the committee should try out chapters on their classes in various settings and report the children's reactions. Students themselves may be the best judges of a textbook for secondary schools. Adults may make surmises about the amount of prior knowledge students must have in order to understand the text, but students are the only ones who can make an accurate judgment.

Time And Money

A serious selection process provides realistic amounts of time for each stage of the curriculum review/ textbook evaluation process. Teacher members will be

given enough release time to do the job properly, and community members' time will be conserved for those tasks they can provide uniquely.

When school districts expect teachers to evaluate a massive number of books and related materials on their own time after a full day of teaching, they send the message that the quality of instructional materials is not very important. When school districts pay stipends to committee members, or devise non-monetary forms of recognition, they send the message that the quality of materials is very important.

If the teacher union complains between contracts about the lack of materials, but forgets all about materials when bargaining for a salary increase, it sends a message that teachers can get along nicely with an impoverished textbook budget. A well designed curriculum review/textbook adoption policy will take time and money into account, and the interested parties will take responsibility for sending a consistent signal about the value of textbooks to teaching and learning.

Steps In The Process

The chairperson of the committee and the appropriate administrator should develop a schedule for the curriculum review/textbook adoption process to ensure an orderly progression of events and a timely placement of textbook orders.

An ideal curriculum review would begin with a day-long seminar on the content and pedagogy of the subject

under consideration. The state or school district's leadership, as well as outside consultants, should have already gathered and disseminated information from the best national experts available in the subject, in content as well as pedagogy. For elementary reading, it would be hard to avoid *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, the work done by the Center for the Study of Reading, Jeanne Chall, and others. In mathematics, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics has developed criteria for mathematics programs. Although there is not yet any consensus about science and social studies, there are clear-cut differences of opinion that ought to be reviewed and discussed by committee members.

Soon after the seminar, a skilled facilitator should lead the committee in a discussion of the major issues in the curriculum under consideration. The purpose of this exercise is to stretch the participants' considerations beyond the usual laundry list of topics and skills. The facilitator should direct the discussion toward the overall theme of a course of study, the overarching principles that subsume the details of the content, or the basic tenets of a discipline or a skill development program.

Participants must be led to make conscious choices about the overall philosophy of a course—choices that guide the selection of supporting elements, as well as the selection of teaching strategies appropriate to content goals. It is not necessary for the committee to achieve consensus. The value is in helping committee members examine their basic assumptions, and in giving them the chance to hear other viewpoints and explore options they may not have considered.

SCHOOL LEVEL DISCOURSE

Committee members should use the interval between this meeting and the next to share these perspectives with their colleagues who do not serve on the committee. Members could make a presentation at a regular faculty or departmental meeting, lead a discussion, and gather perspectives from their colleagues.

ESTABLISHING A REVISED CURRICULUM

At the next meeting, the committee should review any available data on student achievement in the current program, agree on what should be revised, added, or deleted (every addition should be accompanied by a corresponding deletion), and establish a new curriculum that will reconcile state or local mandates with the committee's vision.

DEVELOPING TEXTBOOK SELECTION CRITERIA

When the new curriculum has been revised and approved, the committee should then develop criteria for an initial selection of a manageable list of textbooks to consider, and a more refined set of criteria for the ultimate selection. Publishers should be provided with a copy of the curriculum, initial sorting criteria, and the final selec-

tion criteria, and then invited to submit materials they believe will address the district's needs. In developing criteria for both levels of review, the committee should keep in mind the following points:

1. A narrow conception of matching the textbook to the curriculum has led adoption committees to ignore the fact that the books they bought were themeless, confusing, or deadly dull. When matching is done by a point-to-point checking of the curriculum's particulars against the textbook's table of contents, captions, index, and glossary, or by computerized key-word searches, those aspects of quality most important to student motivation and engagement with the material are going to be ignored.

2. Adequately developed context, the presentation of underlying principles, and the use of vivid examples and counter-examples may be more important to student understanding and retention than particular events, episodes, or facts chosen by an author. The process should encourage committee members to restrain their enthusiasm for the particulars they love to teach, and to keep an open mind about the particulars the author has chosen.

3. More weight should be given to the book's overall academic integrity, its depth and clarity, the quality of its prose, its factual accuracy, and its capacity to motivate and stimulate students, than to test congruence, "ease of use," and management aids. If the students won't read the book or can't understand it, the book's value as an independent reinforcer of learning is lost.

4. A rating sheet with too many items, or with items that ask the rater to quantify attributes that are inherently qualitative ("chapter summary," for example) causes

raters to lose their focus. It is better to evaluate fewer items qualitatively, and in depth, than to evaluate everything "objectively," but superficially.

5. The committee needs time to develop common understanding of the criteria for selection. They need time to develop agreement about what kinds of redundancy are desirable, and what kinds are wasteful. They need a common approach to the balance between content and skills, and how the two should be integrated.

6. Time is short and the task is massive. Therefore, the selection process should provide for the division of labor according to the talents and interests of committee members. Some people are naturally better than others at assessing overall coherence. Some people are better than others at predicting whether students will be able to read and remember the material. Some members will be better qualified than others to assess community sensibilities, or to judge the book's accuracy and academic integrity.

7. Teacher members should be encouraged to try out a chapter on students. There are few better sources of information about a textbook's effectiveness than student response to it and a teacher's assessment of the value of the suggestions in the teacher edition.

PUBLISHER PRESENTATIONS

Publisher representatives often know more about their own offerings than anyone else. Although excessive or uncontrolled contacts between salesmen and adoption

committees have led to abuses, reasonable and controlled interaction can improve the selection process. A small hearing at which publishers' representatives have equal time to talk about their books, or a series of informal punch-and-cookies sessions with company representatives, can sharpen awareness of the rationale behind the textbook's design and its instructional potential.

Applying Final Selection Criteria

Following the principles mentioned above, the committee should organize a process for applying the final selection criteria. There should be time to order and rank the importance of various criteria, and time for thoughtful discussion about how various criteria will be interpreted. In such a discussion, it is useful to have the participants view examples drawn from the research literature on effective textbooks—examples that have been empirically determined to be effective or ineffective with populations of students. Through this process, the members can sharpen analytic skills.

If grade-to-grade consistency or progression is an issue, the administration should provide sufficient logistical support to make such an analysis feasible and meaningful. Where the criteria are clearly qualitative in nature, the committee members should not be forced to assign numerical ratings; rather, the process should provide the members enough time to present defended opinions.

Organizing Help From The Community

There is no substitute for actually reading the book, but the reality is that working teachers don't have time to read 10 or 20 books cover to cover. One county school district in Ohio (Hamilton County) has developed a Citizen Reader Program that assures that all the books under consideration will be read and evaluated in their entirety. Community members apply for voluntary service in the program with the understanding that they will be expected to read and evaluate up to 20 books, and that their evaluations are only advisory. Hamilton County has found the experience beneficial. Even lay readers who initially approached the task from some ideological standpoint eventually became interested in the more basic aspects of the task.

Taking, And Respecting, The Committee's Vote

Before the committee takes a final vote, its members should be told in advance of any financial constraints on their decisions. A committee that has planned to adopt two textbooks, or to fill in gaps in coverage with supplemental materials, should not find out at the eleventh hour that there is not enough money for that purpose. When the committee members have applied their criteria to the books at hand, and considered all the evidence from other sources, it should then take a vote.

Board policy should permit the superintendent (or the board itself) to reject committee decisions, but not to initiate their own or substitute in part. Such a policy would restrain the superintendent and board from editing textbooks by committee or censoring particular books or portions of them in response to aggressive community groups. At the same time, the policy maintains the superintendent's authority and responsibility for the actions of his subordinates, and retains the board's ultimate authority and responsibility for curriculum policy.

When superintendents have second-guessed committee choices for reasons undisclosed at the beginning of the process, or when boards have overturned committee preferences in response to a community maelstrom, the result has been to make teachers even more cynical than they already are about their role in textbook selection. It is good public policy to encourage teachers to take the task seriously and to live with their choices.

Learning To Use The Book

It sometimes takes teachers a year or two to learn how to use a new textbook well. The shakedown period can be shortened by well-designed inservice training on the use of the book. If the chosen textbook has been used in a nearby district, teachers experienced in its strengths and weaknesses can be called in to help. Publishers' representatives can conduct the sessions, although the administration needs to maintain a skeptical presence during such sessions.

As teachers begin to work with a new textbook program, the administration needs to create opportunities for teachers to share their experiences openly. Administrators have often led teachers to believe they must go through a book page by page under the mistaken impression that scrupulous coverage will raise test scores or ensure compliance with the state or local curriculum. Publishers sometimes suggest children will be shortchanged if anything in the textbook is skipped. For these reasons, teachers are sometimes afraid to discuss a book's weaknesses with other teachers, or to admit they have skipped sections they thought were useless.

Few of today's textbooks are consistently good. If teachers are encouraged to discuss the book's shortcomings with colleagues, and to develop ways to compensate for those shortcomings, student learning and teacher professionalism will be enhanced.

COMMUNICATE WITH PUBLISHERS

Textbook publishers are exquisitely sensitive to their markets. If some aspect of a textbook is particularly good, publishers will be encouraged to continue that approach in the subsequent edition–if they are told that it is good. If something is poorly done, the publishers are not likely to correct the problem in the next edition if they don't know the problem exists. A letter signed by a faculty member, a curriculum supervisor, or the superintendent will be taken seriously. Communications of this kind are one way that even small school districts can influence the quality of textbooks in the future.

APPENDIX I

AN ANNOTATED LIST OF TYPICAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES THAT DRIVE UP THE COST OF TEXTBOOKS WHILE DIMINISHING THEIR VALUE TO STUDENTS

1. Requiring a Recent Publication Date

Whether it is required by law, regulation, or custom, the practice of adopting textbooks with this year's (or at the very least, last year's) publication date is nearly universal in the United States. In some cases, adoption authorities believe a recent publication date signifies up-to-date content, although there is overwhelming evidence that it does not. In other cases they fear parental complaints about "old" books. Whatever the rationalization, the belief that anything new is better than anything old is as American as apple pie. In the case of textbooks, it is also a very expensive and destructive preference. It is expensive because publishers must issue new editions every two, three, or four years in order to qualify for successive statewide adoption contests, and the manufacturing costs for new editions are *the single most expensive item in the*

production of textbooks. It is destructive because publishers are forced into hasty revisions, and haste is antithetical quality.

2. Seeking or Accepting Free Extras

The practice, whether sanctioned or not, of wheedling "free" materials from textbook salesmen as a precondition to textbook adoption is rampant in the United States. Needless to say, none of these materials is really free because the costs are absorbed in the price of the basic textbook. Informed industry experts estimate that freebies now account for 20 percent of the cost of textbooks. A number of jurisdictions have tried to stop the practice by requiring publishers and local school districts to report on themselves; not surprisingly, these measures have been ineffective. In our view, policymakers who are serious about both ethics and cost control will need to impose severe sanctions in order to stop the practice.

3. Requiring Publishers to Produce a Correlational Analysis

In their preoccupation with curricular congruence, most adoption states and many local school districts require publishers to produce a document (or several documents) that cross-references their lists of curricular goals and objectives or the areas to be tested on standardized

tests with the textbook's contents. The production of these documents is labor intensive and therefore expensive. Although publishers know that hardly anyone actually reads them, they must produce these instruments anyway because they are required. Publishers freely admit that they "cut the suit to fit the cloth," grasping at mere words or captions that will prove congruence. Common sense and fiscal prudence suggest that policymakers should abandon this requirement, which is expensive at best and destructive at worst.

4. Checking Curricular Congruence Through Computerized Key-Word Searches

A number of states, most of them in the South, have paid handsome sums to contractors to correlate textbook content with curricular and test requirements. This procedure is a more efficient (but more deadly) form of correlational analysis. While using an outside contractor (rather than the seller) would seem to ensure a correlation with more integrity, the method employed (a mechanical detection of word frequencies and passage lengths) will inevitably force publishers into an even more mechanical process of textbook development. The book that uses the word "mitosis" four times in two pages will have an advantage over the book that explains mitosis well in one and a half pages while only using the term twice. This procedure is not only expensive, but destined to intensify the "mentioning" problem.

5. Requiring Publishers to Conduct Field Trials (or "Learner Verification and Revision")

Some states, notably Florida, thought they were doing a fine thing by requiring publishers to test out new books on students, report deficiencies, and revise accordingly. The result has been such a disappointment that Florida has all but abandoned the program. Common sense would suggest that asking the seller to report on his own product's deficiencies is like asking a rabbit to deliver a head of lettuce. Not surprisingly, publishers have learned to turn these field trials into an effective sales strategy. Publishers carefully pick influential teachers to conduct field trials, and then woo them with attention and support. Not surprisingly, these teachers promote the book, if only on the basis of their newfound familiarity with it. Although testing a book out on students is probably the ideal method for determining its value, asking the seller to do it adds to the cost of the book without enhancing its quality.

6. Requiring Publishers to Post Performance Bonds

Once upon a time, when the United States was a developing nation with a primitive communication and transportation system, buccaneer textbook publishers would sign contracts with states or localities and not deliver the books on time. In an effort to protect themselves, turn-of-

the-century legislatures enacted requirements for publishers to post performance bonds, presumably on the theory that even if the students didn't have any books, at least the district would have the money. In 1988, performance bonds no longer make good sense. Performance bonds increase the cost of doing business (and thus the cost of the books) in an era when no publisher could get away with the sharp business practices that flourished in a frontier society. More importantly, the requirement restrains trade. Small but worthy publishers simply cannot afford to enter the contest in states or localities with high performance bond requirements.

7. Rewarding Publishers Who Produce the Largest Number of Extras

In some places, notably Texas, rating sheets give publishers credit for producing a large array of materials supposedly designed to complement the student textbook. In order to be competitive, publishers increasingly divert energy and resources away from the main product— the student book—and toward the production of a glittering array of high and low-tech peripherals. Texas requires publishers to produce a Spanish edition even though few local districts buy it. When the schools do not ultimately buy these extra products, the cost of producing them must be borne by the basic textbook. Thus these extra materials, many of marginal value, drive up the cost of textbooks without enhancing their quality.

8. Requiring Publishers to Maintain On-Site Sales Personnel During the Course of an Adoption Season

In many places, textbook publishers must provide a small army of salesmen to staff textbook depositories or run around to local districts making presentations about their products. Since few adoption committees have time to actually read the books, these traveling road shows primarily benefit the companies with the most engaging salesmen, and not necessarily the companies with the most effective textbooks. This requirement virtually prevents small but good publishers from entering many big adoption state contests. The largest companies, of course, add the enormous cost of this sales force to the price of textbooks.

9. On-the-Fly Selection Procedures

Wherever policymakers tolerate a hasty examination of books, they encourage publishers to spend money on expensive (and often non- didactic) packaging and graphics at the expense of text quality. Cheap selection procedures have a way of creating expensive books, if only because the books must be very thick to carry a salable number of graphics.

10. Requiring Publishers to Train Teachers in the Use of the Adopted Books

There is a strong case to be made for training teachers to use a new book. Further, textbook company personnel often know more about the thoughtful use of their own products than anyone else. But it is also true that requiring the company to perform the training adds significantly to the publisher's cost of doing business, and thus to the price of the textbook. School personnel often think they are quite clever to insist that the publisher sign a service contract. Such a move hides the true costs of inservice training (it comes in the form of inflated textbook prices) and preserves the vulnerable inservice budget for other purposes. Thus the money savings is an illusion, and the training may or may not be disinterested and effective.

11. Extravagant Sampling Requirements

In some jurisdictions, publishers are required to supply enormous numbers of sample books for review. While no one would suggest that a state or locality should buy a product without encouraging a large number of people to examine it, the sad fact is that many of the sample books aren't really examined. Once again, only the major companies, tooled to please everyone, can afford to put out up to a million dollars worth of samples before capturing a dime on their investment. Once again, small publishers are restrained from entering the market.

NOTES

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4 FitzGerald, Frances, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Random House, 1980.

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APPENDIX II
TABLES

TABLE I
ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL FOR TEXTBOOKS BY STATE 1986

1. District of Columbia	$67.64	28. Okalahoma	$33.97
2. Kentucky	$50.42	29. Michigan	$33.51
3. Wyoming	$50.01	30. New Hampshire	$33.37
4. South Dakota	$48.80	31. Iowa	$33.24
5. Arizona	$47.31	32. Maine	$33.04
6. New Jersey	$45.31	33. Pennsylvania	$32.74
7. Kansas	$44.60	34. Florida	$32.07
8. New Mexico	$41.93	35. Oregon	$31.82
9. Minnesota	$39.97	36. California	$31.61
10. Montana	$39.84	37. Maryland	$30.78
11. Texas	$39.65	38. Georgia	$30.36
12. North Dakota	$39.60	39. Ohio	$29.62
13. West Virginia	$39.47	40. Vermont	$28.20
14. Illinois	$39.34	41. Tennessee	$28.16
15. Delaware	$39.15	42. Arkansas	$28.13
16. Rhode Island	$38.66	43. South Carolina	$27.43
17. Missouri	$38.63	44. Louisiana	$27.37
18. Connecticut	$38.32	45. Virginia	$27.02
19. North Carolina	$38.30	46. Washington	$26.16
20. Alaska	$37.04	47. Indiana	$26.06
21. Colorado	$36.59	48. Mississippi	$22.11
22. Nevada	$36.44	49. Idaho	$20.47
23. Wisconsin	$36.18	50. Alabama	$20.37
24. New York	$35.68	51. Utah	$19.10
25. Massachusetts	$35.02		
26. Nebraska	$34.97	*SOURCE: Association of American*	
27. Hawaii	$34.30	*Publishers Industry Statistics, 1986*	

TABLE II

ESTIMATED INDUSTRY SALES OF TEXTBOOKS BY STATE 1986

STATE	EST IND SALES	% OF SALES	STATE	EST IND SALES	% OF SALES
1. California	$ 155,203	10.17	31. Oregon	$ 15,084	.99
2. Texas	132,632	8.69	32. W. Virginia	14,287	.94
3. New York	112,718	7.39	33. Arkansas	12,630	.83
4. Illinois	83,961	5.50	34. New Mexico	11,991	.79
5. Pennsylvania	67,774	4.44	35. Mississippi	11,959	.78
6. Michigan	63.607	4.17	36. Nebraska	10,702	. 70
7. Ohio	61,128	4.01	37. Utah	8,020	.53
8. New Jersey	60,268	3.95	38. Maine	7,533	.49
10. N. Carolina	43,507	2.85	39. Wash. DC	7,238	.47
	$ 839,262	55.00	40. Hawaii	6,997	.46
				$1,468,324	96.21
11. Missouri	$ 36,079	2.36	41. S. Dakota	$ 6,637	.43
12. Kentucky	36,000	2.36	42. Montana	6,415	.42
13. Georgia	34,947	2.29	43. Rhode Is.	6,379	.42
14 Mass.	34,701	2.27	44. N. Hamp.	6,207	.41
15. Wisconsin	33,796	2.21	45. Nevada	6,122	.40
16. Minnesota	30,737	2.01	46. Wyoming	5,251	.34
17. Virginia	28,401	1.86	47. N. Dakota	5,069	.33
18. Arizona	28,338	1.86	48. Delaware	4,580	.30
19. Indiana	27,811	1.82	49. Idaho	4,361	.29
20. Louisiana	25,837	1.69	50. Alaska	4,037	.26
	$1,155,909	75.73	51. Vermont	2,848	.19
				$1,526,230	100.00
21. Tennessee	25,063	1.64			
22. Maryland	24,071	1.58			
23. Colorado	21,663	1.42			
24. Conneticut	21,500	1.41			
25. Washington	21,298	1.40			
26. Oklahoma	20,278	1.33			
27. Kansas	20,072	1.32			
28. S. Carolina	18,052	1.18			
30. Alabama	16,259	1.07			
	$1,361,883	89.24			

SOURCE: Association of American Publishers Industry Statistics, 1986

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